Female Consciousness

In Contemporary Chinese Women's Writing

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Contents

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Abstract

Contemporary Chinese women writers re-emerged after the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). This thesis investigates a selection of stories by Chinese women writers published between 1979 and the end of 1990s. The investigation argues for an oppositional female consciousness and endeavors to demonstrate its various expressions in women writers' texts, covering such themes as love, family, career, intellectuals, working class, the female self, and social manners. Apart from the thematic concerns of female consciousness, the thesis also explores its expressions in unconventional narrative styles of representative women writers' texts. In conclusion, the thesis points out that female consciousness provided women writers, who live as women, a vantage-point from which they may view the self as well as others and society. In so doing, they write differently (from their male peers) and subversively.

Introduction

Prose fiction by Chinese women writers first started to flourish around the May Fourth period (1917-1927).[1] In their co-authored book *Emerging from the Horizon of History* Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua researched the theretofore unprecedented phenomenon and discovered the existence of "female points of view, female positions, female perspectives of life and sexual relations, and a female aesthetic mode" in women's writings published between the May Fourth period and the founding of the People's Republic of China (referred to as PRC hereafter) in 1949.[2] It is not just arbitrary that they chose not to continue their analysis of texts by women writers published after the founding of the PRC; the proliferation of women's writing came to a halt under Mao's regime.

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[1]. There is a wealth of scholarship about the May Fourth period, including Chow Tse-tsung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1960) and Schwarcz, Vera, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

[2]. Meng Yue & Dai Jinhua. *Fuchu lishi dibiao* (Floating out of the horizon of history) (Zhengzhou: Henan Renmin Press, 1989), p.263. In this thesis, all English translations from Chinese sources are mine unless the publication is specified as an English version translated by a specific translation agency or published by such publishing houses as "Foreign Languages Press" in China where translation is often provided anonymously.

Although there were still a few women writing in the seventeen years between the founding of the PRC in 1949 and the commencement of the Cultural Revolution in 1966,[3] women's writing as a gender-specific literature descended into oblivion. As Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua pointed out, the newly established tradition of "gendered position [in women's writing] discontinued, and almost no one dared to explore it, let alone develop and deepen it. . . . The word 'gender' was no longer speakable . . ."[4] Indeed, the Chinese revolution, which declared equality between men and women in China, disallowed women's expression of gender-specific thoughts and experiences in literature.

Nevertheless, in an effort to discover gender-specific characteristics in literary works published in the seventeen years before the Cultural Revolution, Chen Shunxin compared women writers' texts with those by male writers, and came to the conclusion that in matters of the narrator's position, cognitive extent, and vantage point, the "masculine" can be summarized as "authoritative, collective, and thus in the mainstream"; whilst the "feminine" can be summarized as "emotional, individual, and thus marginal".[5] Chen's selection of texts stopped short at the Cultural Revolution, because there was almost no literature to talk about in that special period of time. For the Cultural Revolution carried Mao's leftist

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[3]. The full name for the Cultural Revolution is the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution." It began in 1966 and came to an end in 1976. For a brief account of the "revolution", one may read Immauel C. Y Hsu, *The Rise of Modern China*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 4th edition, 1990), pp. 689-706, also Simon Leys, *The Chairman's New Clothes: Mao and the Cultural Revolution*, trans. Carol Appleyard and Patrick Goode. London: Allison and Bushby, 1977.

[4]. Meng Yue & Dai Jinhua, p. 264.

[5]. Chen Shunxin, *Zhongguo dangdai wenxue de xushi he xingbie* (Gender and narrative in contemporary Chinese literature) (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Press, 1995), p.113.

line to the extreme, which persecuted and physically tortured almost all writers and virtually stopped creative writing.[6]

An unprecedented number of women writers, however, burst onto the literary scene after the Cultural Revolution and scholars, both inside and outside China, have made extensive study of the contemporary body of Chinese women's writing in modern Chinese literature.[7] Indeed, it is quite true that to many Chinese critics "*nüxing wenxue* (female literature) is more or less *a fait accompli*, something that preexists before the critical effort to name it as such", but the female literary tradition, as Lydia H. Liu tactfully pointed out, is a critical construction.[8] If Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua

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[6] . There were underground literary writings during the Cultural Revolution; a number of contemporary poets such as Bei Dao and Yang Lian emerged from the underground literature. For more information, read Bonnie McDougall, "Underground Literature: Two Reports from Hong Kong" in *Contemporary China* 2, 4 (1979): 80-90; also Bei Dao, "Translation Style" in Wendy Larson and Anne Wedell-Wedellsborg (eds.), *Inside Out: Modernism and Postmodernism in Chinese Literary Culture*. Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 1993.

[7]. There have been two kinds of periodization of Chinese literature since the May Fourth period. One sticks to a political periodization and classifies literary works between the May Fourth and the founding of the PRC as "modern Chinese literature" and what came out after as "contemporary"; this periodization was conventional among the literary scholarship in mainland China. C. T. Hsia, a well-known literary critic and historian specialized in Chinese literature included literary works published after the founding of the PRC in his *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction: 1917-1957* (New haven and London: Yale University Press, 1961). In doing so he challenged the political periodization in mainland China. Recently, Chinese critics in mainland China have been rethinking about the political periodization and put forward the opinion that periodization of Chinese literature should not follow political events but be carried out in regard to the change and movement inside literature itself. For further reference see Chen Guoqiu (ed.), *Zhongguo wenxueshi de fansi* (Reflection on the history of Chinese literature). Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co. Ltd., 1993. In this thesis "contemporary Chinese women's writing" refers to the body of writings by mainland Chinese women writers published after the Cultural Revolution.

[8]. After she quoted from Men Yue and Dai Jinhua's claim of a female tradition ("Having rejected the status quo, May Fourth women writers were able to initiate their own tradition in the cracks and fissures of their culture." Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua, p. 14; translation is Liu's), Liu wrote: "What strikes me as important is less the truth of various claims for a female literary tradition (which women critics have no vested interest in calling into question) . . . the female tradition did not come to its own until *after* women scholars began to make significant interventions in literary criticism and historiography (a field heretofore dominated by men) in the second half of the 1980s." See Lydia H. Liu, "Invention and Intervention: The Female Tradition in Modern Chinese Literature"

initialized the historical and ideological set-up of this female literary tradition before the founding of the PRC, and Chen Shunxin more or less continued the construction of this tradition into the years between 1949 and 1966, then my thesis can be seen as an endeavor to partake in this critical construction.

This thesis thus investigates the re-emergence of a distinct body of women's prose fiction in China after the Cultural Revolution. My selection of texts covers the post-Mao period towards the end of the 1990s, highlighting a changing female consciousness as I read it in women writers' texts, which cover such themes as love, family, career, intellectuals, working class, the female self, and social manners. Apart from the thematic concerns of female consciousness, I shall also discuss its expressions in unconventional narrative styles, notably, in works by Can Xue, Liu Sola, and Fang Fang, who heralded either a new school of modernist writing (Can Xue and Liu Sola) or the so-called "new realism" (Fang Fang) in contemporary Chinese literature.

To make fiction by women writers an object of study is justified, among other reasons, by the publications of numerous anthologies of stories exclusively written by women in recent years, based obviously on the reason that women writers write differently from male writers. Indeed, their works are generally distinguishable from those of their male peers in terms of content, style and point of view. Facing numerous stories written by women writers, how did I select those for analysis? My selection is largely arbitrary. Nevertheless, the texts discussed in this thesis are selected

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in T. E. Barlow (ed.), *Gender Politics in Modern China* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 34.

according to two criteria: either the selected text was influential during the new period or it is conspicuous because of its strong feminist tendency. In the latter case the text would best exemplify a female consciousness which, as I shall argue, is the basic factor that makes women's texts generally different from those written by men. In the former case, the influential text is selected because it serves as a good example of how the seemingly gender-neutral textual power is effected by a female consciousness that strikes the critical chords at a right time in a national context. In my discussion both kinds of texts would evidence that the existence of female consciousness plays an important part in the textual formation, thematically and/or stylistically.

Female Consciousness

A discursive attention to female consciousness is, therefore, a textual thread that strings up my chapters. My effort can be seen as a response to the feminist recognition that "[h]istory must include an account of the female experience over time and should include the development of feminist consciousness as an essential aspect of women's past."[9] The term "female consciousness" (*nüxing yishi* in Chinese) as used in China includes "feminist consciousness", since "feminism" is translated as "female-ism" (*nüxing zhuyi*) in Chinese. An older translation of "feminism" was literally "female right-ism" (*nüquan zhuyi*). Compared with the old translation, the new translation accentuates a strong consciousness of women as a gender. The term "female consciousness" has

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[9]. Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" in Elizabeth Abel (ed.), *Writing and Sexual Difference* (London: The Harvester Press, 1982), p. 28.

been used by Chinese critics in a way associable to western critics' discussions about the relationship between the gender of women writers and their writing. As Xaviére Gauthier asks: "*In what ways does their writing call attention to the fact that they are women?*"[10] Whilst there are a variety of answers to the question, ranging from female biology to female socialization, I find the one centered on female consciousness is most adoptable and most flexible in explaining both the content and style of women's texts in terms of gender difference.

This female consciousness is interpreted in different ways. First of all it is related to the female body. The Chinese critic Ren Yimin considers that "a woman writer cannot avoid being conscious of the fact that she is writing as a woman".[11] As he writes:

> A woman writer would always feel, experience, and consider the fate of human beings and the fate of women. The self-aware female consciousness and non-self-aware female unconsciousness would cumulate together in a woman writer's psychological and biological mechanisms, and would constitute and determine the artistic characteristics of her writing as well as informing her aesthetic consciousness.[12]

In regard to the first sentence quoted above, it would be more accurate to say that a woman writer "would always feel, experience, and consider the fate of human beings and the fate of women" *from her gendered position*

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[10]. Elaine Marks & Esabelle de Courtivron (eds.), *New French Feminisms* (New York: The Harvest Press, 1981), p. 161.

[11]. Ren Yimin, "Nüxing wenxue de xiandaixing yanjiu" (Research on the modernity of women's literature) in *Xiaoshuo pinglun* (Fiction review), Xi'an: 3 (1988).

[12]. Ibid.

as a woman. From her gendered experience she would "gender" every literary character. As Kristeva points out: "Women who write are brought, at their own pace and in their own way, to see sexual differentiation as interior to the praxis of every subject."[13] In relation to female consciousness to the female body, Ren Yimin's point of view of female consciousness and female unconsciousness being cumulated in not only "psychological" but also "biological" mechanisms is problematic. For in the world of language, there is no direct presence of things, but everything is mediated by language. As a language construct, it is impossible for any idea or ideology to cumulate in a woman's biological mechanism. Nevertheless, Ren Yimin's inclusion of female unconsciousness is a good point, because in creative writing unconsciousness, as Freud points out and as many writers have proved, plays an important role. It is the self-aware female consciousness and non-self-aware female unconsciousness together that constitute and determine the artistic characteristics of a woman's writing as well as informing her aesthetic consciousness. To avoid redundancy, the term "female consciousness" as used in this thesis would also implicate female unconsciousness.

Female consciousness as such is rooted in women's lived experience and therefore social. Against China's gender-neutralizing "revolutionary" background, the critic Yu Qing emphasizes female consciousness as socially determined:

> The female gender is formulated in societal terms. And as long as the social factors constitutive of the female gender remain, gendered

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[13]. Elaine Marks & Esabelle de Courtivron (eds.), *New French Feminisms* (New York: The Harvest Press, 1981), p. 166.

> consciousness and gendered literature will not go away. The so-called ultimate (transcendental) consciousness and ultimate literature, therefore, do not and will not exist.[14]

The social nature of female consciousness asserts the importance of women's lived experience, which is the very materiality of female consciousness that informs women's writings as different from those of men's.

Any viewpoint that sees experience and consciousness as two discrete categories is then problematic. Judith Kegan Gardiner recounts that the two categories were used by western feminist critics separately to explain what makes women's writing different from men's. "The most common answer is that women's experience is different from men's in profound and regular ways."[15] And the "other main explanation of female difference posits a 'female consciousness' that produces style and structures innately different from those of the 'masculine mind.' " Gardiner comments that the argument from experience is "plausible but limited in its applications" and the argument from female consciousness is "subject to mystification and circular evidence". Actually, Gardiner's criticism is not quite to the point. How can one have consciousness without experiencing anything? It is impossible for a person to express experience without consciousness of the experience. The separation of consciousness from experience is false and spurious.

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[14]. Yu Qing, "Kunan de shenhua: lun nüxing wenxue nüxing yishi de lishi fazhan guiji" (The sublimation of suffering: tracing the historical development of female literature and female consciousness), *Dangdai Wenyi Sichao* 1987:6, p. 55; quoted from Lydia H. Liu's "Invention and Intervention: The Female Tradition in Modern Chinese Literature" in T. E. Barlow (ed.), *Gender Politics in Modern China*, p. 37

Consciousness and experience are closely connected also because they both belong to the domain of signs, and share the same semiotic character. Consciousness is formed by the sign and its reality is the same as that of the sign. "Outside of the material of signs there is no psyche."[16] What can be called as experience is marked by meaning, and as such is already in the form of the sign which makes up consciousness. Consciousness and experience cannot be separated because experience as meaningful expression is already expression of consciousness. Moreover, consciousness and experience are interdependent and interacting. Although consciousness is rooted in experience, change of consciousness would incur change of experience and vice versa.

Thus, female consciousness and experience of womanhood are interdependent and interacting. Yet, can all consciousnesses based on lived experiences of womanhood be designated as female consciousness? Refracting womanhood, a woman's consciousness may include internalization of patriarchal inculcation because the female speaking subject is spoken by ideology. As Rey Chow describes what "a well-bred [Chinese] woman" of a traditional mentality would see when she "turns inside to 'herself,'": she would run "straight into the two-thousand-year-old definitions, expectations, and clichés of what she always already 'is'."[17] Would such a woman's contemplation also reflect female consciousness? Ren Yimin assumes female consciousness to be any gender-related

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[15]. Judith Kegan Gardiner, "On Female Identity and Writing by Women" in Elizabeth Abel (ed.), *Writing and Sexual Difference* (London: The Harvester Press, 1982) p, 178.

[16]. V. N. Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matelka and I. R. Titunik (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 26.

consciousness on the part of a woman, but it can be further divided into traditional female consciousness and modern female consciousness. In this regard, all women writers express female consciousness, some conveying traditional female consciousness, others repudiating it and displaying modern female consciousness.[18]

Although traditional ideology still lingers on, women have entered modern time and acquired modern experience, therefore, the female consciousness which I shall highlight in this thesis is a modern one. This modern female consciousness can be understood in both a strict and a broad sense. Strictly, the Chinese critic Du Fangqin defines it as "a woman's evaluation, feelings and recognition of women's existential values, morality, and aesthetic activities when she stands as a thinking, feeling and cognitive subject."[19] This definition, radical as it is, is limited by a womanly sphere, which remains the sphere women writers are most concerned about. Broadly, this modern female consciousness encompasses a gendered way of seeing. As Yu Qing writes:

> In coming to maturity, female consciousness does not seek to submerge its gender in order to arrive at some abstractly conceived and genderless human condition. It aims to enter the overall human conception of the objective world from the special angle of the female subject and to view and participate in universal human activities

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[17]. See Rey Chow, *Women and Chinese Modernity: the Politics of Reading between West and East* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 61.

[18]. Ren Yimin, "Nüxing wenxue de xiandaixing yanjin" (Research on the modernity of women's literature) in *Xiaoshuo pinglun* (Fiction review), Xi'an: 3 (1988).

[19]. Du Fangqin. *Nüxing guannian de yanbian* (The change of the female concept). (Zhengzhou: Henan Renmin Press, 1988), p. 378.

from the particular viewpoint of the female gender that is uniquely constructed as such.[20]

As a socio-ideological fact, female consciousness in literary expressions ("the signs" in Bakhtinian terms) has to be read in the specific historical and socioideological context in which the women writers write. Such kind of reading is not just socio-ideologically meaningful, but concerns the very form of expressions. As Volosinov puts:

> Every sign, as we know, is a construct between socially organized persons in the process of their interaction. Therefore, the forms of signs are conditioned above all by the social organization of the participants involved and also by the immediate conditions of their interaction. When these forms change, so does sign. And it should be one of the tasks of the study of ideologies to trace this social life of the verbal sign. Only so approached can the problem of the relationship between sign and existence find its concrete expression; only then will the process of the causal shaping of the sign by existence stand out as a process of genuine existence-to-sign transit, of genuine dialectical refraction of existence in the sign.[21]

In other words, only by reading against women's historical and socio-ideological existence, can we find out how women's writings have been different and how womanhood itself shapes women's creative expressions. Such reading means reading into the text as well as the context.

Such reading therefore involves the recognition that female consciousness is not an "authentic" consciousness directly from women's

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[20]. Quoted from the same source as footnote 14.

[21]. Volosinov, V. N. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matelka and I. R. Titunik (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 21.

bodily experience. Even in areas where women's lived experiences generate "feminine values", female consciousness as gendered consciousness necessarily implies patriarchal ideology. For example, feminist critics often come to the same opinion about feminine qualities, which are by no means authentic but re-appropriations of patriarchal prescriptions of women. As the Chinese critic Yi Qing writes:

> For women writers, the specific life experience and psychical sediments are more an endowment than a limit. They are a valuable gift from history. As wives they have learned to be considerate and devoted; as mothers they have learned to compromise and adopt other's opinions. . . . They experience the world in a special way which male writers can hardly grasp.[22]

Gardiner comes to a similar re-appropriation when she tries to explain the difference between women's writing and men's writing from an identity theory. She draws on Nancy Chodorow's mother-daughter theory to come to a picture of female identity. She explains that a girl's personality takes shape differently from that of a boy. First, "a girl forms her gender identity positively, in becoming like the mother with whom she begins life in a symbiotic merger." Second, she "must develop in such a way that she can pleasurably re-create the mother-infant symbiosis when she herself becomes a mother."[23] As a result, women "develop capacities for nurturance, dependence, and empathy more easily than men do and

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[22]. Yi Qing, "Yi ge congman huoli de zhidian: ye tan xunzhao nanren de nüxing wenxue" (A Dynamic leverage: also talk about 'men-searching' female literature) *Dangdai Wenyi Sichao* (The thought wave of contemporary literature and arts), 2 (1987).

[23]. Judith Kegan Gardiner, "On Female Identity and Writing by Women" in Elizabeth Abel (ed.), *Writing and Sexual Difference* (London: The Harvester Press, 1982) p, 182.

are less threatened by those qualities".[24] Such capacities include the feminine qualities acquired by women in being wife and mother as stated by Yi Qing quoted previously.

Thus in different terms both the Chinese critic and the western critic come to more or less the same feminine characteristics.[25] As can be seen, both opinions are open to question and phallocentric language influence in both is only too obvious. For instance, in the Chinese critic's comment, the wifely quality of being devoted can be read as self-erasure, a patriarchal imposition on women; also Gardiner's assumption that a girl "must develop in such a way that she can pleasurably re-create the mother-infant symbiosis" conveys a large dose of conventional instillation. Women's writing or the feminist re-appropriation of conventional values shaped by men, as Elaine Showalter points out, is "a double-voiced discourse that always embodies the social, literary and cultural heritages of both the muted and the dominant".[26] This also shows that while women share common bodily experience in childbearing and child-rearing, generalization can be a very unreliable undertaking.

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[24]. Ibid.

[25]. Since the mid-1980s Chinese critics have been deeply concerned with borrowing from the west to undo orthodox Maoism. Thus the similarity discussed here could have resulted from the Chinese critic's absorption of western feminist theory. However, there is no hard evidence to show that the Chinese critic involved here had modeled his/her opinion on any specific western theory. In fact, Chinese feminist scholars may be very antagonistic towards certain western theories. For example, Li Xiaojiang, the Chinese feminist scholar who first set up women's studies in tertiary education in China, vehemently vindicated essentialism at an international conference convened by Beijing University in June 1998. Her speech is included in the conference anthology *Papers from the Conference of Women Studies and Research in the 21st Century*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Women Studies Research Center of Beijing University, 1998), pp. 9-22.

[26]. Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" in Elizabeth Abel (ed.), *Writing and Sexual Difference*, p. 31.

Given the complexities of language construction in our thinking, I shall not assume female consciousness to be "genuine" or "authentic". In my reading female consciousness has no "essence" and changes along with the changing context. My reading and the text in discussion constitute an approach of "tinkering" with female existence which cannot but address the contextual social situation at the same time.[27]

This approach materializes an epistemological mode, which directs attention to details and fragments that are alien or contrary to some grand pictures described by dominant narratives. Its sensitivity towards what used to be brushed aside or canceled out as "trivial" or "inappropriate" suits the demand for reading women's writing. As Showalter points out:

> [T]he delicate divergency of the woman's text challenges us to respond with equal delicacy and precision to the small but crucial deviations, the cumulative weightings of experience and exclusion, that have marked the history of women's writing.[28]

To look into the details and to read in the details and between details, is an effective way to find out the small but crucial deviations, experiences, and the muted in women's texts.

From text to text, details change, and so the expressions of female consciousness. In this process I see the development of female consciousness coming increasingly to the open and evolving significant stylistic changes, which in turn reconfirms the epistemological mode of

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[27]. I borrowed the word "tinkering" from Richard Rorty when he says that "the best way of tinkering with ourselves is to tinker with something else". See Richard Rorty "Freud and Moral Reflection" in *Essays on Heidegger and Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 163.

[28]. Ibid., p. 16.

seeing the detail and fragment as an effective cultural intervention. As far as its triviality is concerned, the detail culturally pertains to the feminine. In this light, women are privileged in their cultural affinity to the detail. Such affinity was also borne out in China's literary history, which I shall look into in detail as a contextual introduction to my discussion of women's texts in this thesis.

The "Appropriate Concealment" and the Feminine

The English term "fiction" (and "novel") has its equivalent in the Chinese word *xiaoshuo*, which literally means "small talk". Being "small" *xiaoshuo* had never enjoyed the esteem traditional scholars paid to poetry and history before the 20th century. Historically restrained, Chinese women writers did not start to write prose fiction until the 20th century. Amid the socio-historical complexities relatable to women's fiction writing, two factors are especially thought-provoking: the original feminine feature of *xiaoshuo* and the concealment of this feature in the literature of the "romantic and heroic" socialist realism.

The two factors are pivoted on one thing: the detail. The detail here refers to those "trivial, frivolous" details, regarded in history as "inappropriate" to the narrative of a laudable cause or a great man. Details as such came into history together with the Chinese word *xiaoshuo*. In terms of its linguistic source, Chinese *xiaoshuo* has a humble origin. Not only is it "small talk" but it was "street gossip recorded by petty officials for the king to gauge social customs."[29] Because it is from street folk, Confucius advises gentlemen "not to do *xiaoshuo*", even though it "may

have some worthy value."[30] The "triviality" of the "inappropriate" detail and the "little talk" of *xiaoshuo* as "street gossip" culturally pertain to the feminine, to the womanly sphere. Quoting Confucius's notorious comparison of women to inferior men (*xiaoren*), Lu Tonglin considers that women and fiction have shared the same diminutive attribute *xiao*, which can be translated as "little", "mean", or "inferior".[31] She further points out that "fiction and women have shared a common fate in various political and intellectual movements. The common attribute and common fate of fiction as a genre and women as a gender are interrelated."[32] I would like to add that in terms of the origin of *xiaoshuo*, it is the "trivial and inappropriate" detail that makes *xiaoshuo* inferior to history and poetry. Once such details are purged from fiction, the status of fiction can be heightened but women's lowly status would not change. In situations of such changes, women writers together with their fiction containing "trivial and inappropriate" details would be concealed or excluded from literary history.

In spite of its humble origin, fiction enjoyed a peculiarly privileged status in modern China. The peculiarly privileged status of fiction was achieved by concealing the feminine in the sense that the feminine stands for the trivial, irrelevant, and therefore "inappropriate". To trace this concealment, I shall turn to historiography, because from its beginning *xiaoshuo* was mixed up with history. In the early 1920s Lu Xun discerned

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[29]. Ban Gu, *Book of Han* (Han shu), vol. 6 (Beijing, 1962), p. 1745.

[30]. Ibid.

[31]. Lu Tonglin, *Misogyny, Cultural Nihilism, and Oppsitional Politics: Contemporary Chinese Experimental Fiction*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 9.

the mix-up of history and *xiaoshuo* in Ban Gu's "Treatise on Literature" (Yiwen zhi). He points out that, side by side with Ban Gu's definition of *xiaoshuo,* are titles of *xiaoshuo* recorded by Ban Gu; yet they "do not look like coming from folk in the street," and some of them are actually about ancient rites recorded in earlier historical documents.[33] If what Lu Xun points out is the adoption of history into fiction, the famous Chinese historian Wu Han, in an article written in 1934, observes that historians "often adopted *xiaoshuo*" in their writing.[34] However, neither Lu Xun nor Wu Han pays any special attention to the narrative model of fiction as evolved from history.

When literary critics tried to find out the formative process of Chinese fiction, they discovered that in China fiction developed its narrative model from within historiography, and the latter is often inseparable from the former. Historiography is essentially story-telling.

> Very few historians saw the events they recorded. Their use of sources and the judgments made on inclusion and exclusion are based of course on their sense of the dependability of the texts, their sense of what is plausible, and the conventions of their time on use of sources, on the one hand, and their specific goals in writing a history, the political context in which they were working, and the

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[32]. Ibid., p. 11.

[33]. See Lu Xun, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilüe* (*A brief outline of the history of Chinese fiction* (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co. Ltd., second printing, 1972), pp. 14-16.

[34]. Wu Han, "Lishi zhong de xiaoshuo" (Fiction in history) in Wu Fuhui (ed.), *Ershi shiji Zhongguo xiaoshuo lilun ziliao* (Fiction theories in the twentieth century China), vol. 3, (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Press, 1997), pp. 249-252.

general understanding of history, truth, and historical truth, on the other.[35]

Confucianism as a doctrine to "help the kings, follow yin/yang, and gain enlightenment in education"[36] cannot reject fictionalization in its historiography. Confucius himself used the *Chunqiu* to "allocate praise and blame, respect and condemnation."[37] And as Marston Anderson points out: "in the *Gongyang* and *Guliang* commentaries to the *Chunqiu* Confucius is credited with initiating the historiographical practice of "appropriate concealment, that is, the purposeful omission of events that would cast a negative light on otherwise worthy individuals."[38] Such concealment fictionalizes the history of worthy individuals.

The Confucian way of "appropriate concealment" known as *Chunqiu bifa* in Chinese[39] played an crucial role not only in historiography but also in socialist realism, as the latter openly declared its mission to serve a grand goal by setting up heroic characters for readers to follow suit. The seed of the literary utilitarianism lies in the belief that to revitalize China the souls of the Chinese must be reformed, which endowed modern Chinese literature with the unbearable task of changing people's

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[35]. Kenneth J. Dewoskin, "The Six Dynasties Chih-kuai and the Birth of Fiction" in Andrew H. Plaks (ed.), *Chinese Narrative: Critical and Theoretical Essays* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977). p. 24.

[36]. Ban Gu, *Hanshu* (Book of Han), p.1728.

[37]. Ibid., p.1715.

[38]. Marston Anderson, *The Limits of Realism: Chinese Fiction in the Revolutionary Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), note 37, p. 22.

[39]. According to *Cihai*, *chunqiu bifa* means "write what should be written down and omit what should be omitted." However, in modern usage *chunqiu bifa* may also mean writing as indirect revelation as "*qubi*". In my argument here I follow the first explanation.

consciousness.[40] The May Fourth new cultural movement strengthened the hope for a new nation through, at least partly, the development of a new literature. Born in the movement of the new culture movement and initially formed and led by intellectuals who were advocates of the new culture themselves, the Chinese Communist Party (hereafter abbreviated as CCP) displayed a sensitivity in the control of literature unusual among its peers in the world. In accordance with Engels's idea about realism representing typical characters in a typical environment and in accordance with the mission to change the souls of the people, "providing spiritual food so as to make the nation great",[41] the mainstream of the new literature since the late 1930s developed towards heroic romanticism or "revolutionary realism combined with revolutionary romanticism" in a later version. I shall trace the thread of the heroic line briefly by looking at the representative writings mainly gathered in *Fiction Theories in the Twentieth Century China*.[42] and then proceed to discuss how major women writers fared in/with the heroic literature, focusing on "appropriate concealment" as it was applied in the spirit of heroic romanticism by men of letters. This is to provide a historical background for the anti-heroic politics of the detail to be discussed in the next section,

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[40]. The power of this belief can be seen in Lu Xun and Guo Moruo, two most well known writers of the modern time. Both initially studied medicine in Japan but turned to literary writing upon the realization of the importance of changing people's consciousness in revitalizing China. However, Lu Xun, before his death in 1936, never produced any writing of this socialist realism that took shape in the late 30s and early 40s marked by the so-called "heroic romanticism".

[41]. The original words are from Chen Fangwu. See Wang Yao, *Xin wenxue shigao* (A draft history of China's new literature) (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Press, revised edition 1982, 5th printing, 1985), p. 59.

[42]. This is a five-volume set of books, each edited by different authors, published by Beijing Daxue Press in 1997. I shall indicate the individual author when referring to passages of the books.

which in turn will provide a way of reading the contemporary women writers discussed in the thesis.

The Resistance War against the Japanese Invasion (1937-1945) called for a combat literature of patriotic heroism. In 1938, Mao Dun, the "most authoritative novelist and theorist on the novel" declared: "all kinds of typicality of the new age have already appeared under the pen of our writers", "writers have begun to choose according to their plans to describe the most typical of heroic events", and then he again reconfirmed that "the highest aim of creative writing is to represent typical characters in typical events".[43] To make events or characters "typical", the "appropriate concealment" would surely be adopted and this was under the direct aegis of the CCP.

In 1941, the writer Sun Li published an article entitled "On the Heroic Literature of the War Period", at the beginning of which he wrote:

> There has never been anybody who values literature as much as the Communist Party. Between April and May this year the Party and the General Quarter of the Eighth Route Army put forward the working policy for literature and arts. The policy will greatly promote our literature and arts and enable us to produce works that reflect our great age in a comparatively short time.[44]

Then he further affirmed the need for "romantic enhancement", emphasizing that "the aim of enhancement is to strengthen people's

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[43]. Qian Liqun, "Introduction" to *Ershi shiji Zhongguo xiaoshuo lilun ziliao* (Fiction theories in the twentieth century China), vol. 4 (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Press, 1997), p. 3.

[44]. Sun Li, "Lun zhanshi de yingxiong wenxue " (On the heroic literature of the war period) in Qian Liqun (ed.), *Ershi shiji Zhongguo xiaoshuo lilun ziliao* (Fiction theories in the twentieth century China), vol. 4 (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Press, 1997), p. 78.

fighting will" and that "romanticism fits in with the fighting, heroic age." Sun Li also raised the "problem of typification in romanticism," calling for such typification by exercising realism, its method, and theory. What Sun Li wrote shows that the typical character of a hero was supposed to be created through "romantic enhancement", which aimed to exaggerate what was considered to be "good" and conceal what was considered to be "inappropriate".

In 1942 Mao made his "Talks at Yan'an Forum on Literature and Arts", in which he criticized the writers who fail to allocate praise and blame, respect and condemnation in a correct way, because they did not research the new socioeconomic form, new class forces, and new thought upon which to decide what to praise, what not to, and what to oppose. And he prescribes that writers should write about "brightness and positive characters"; shortcomings of the revolutionary masses can only be criticized so as to "educate and heighten the masses".[45] Under Maoism literature must conceal darkness and be eulogizing; it is politically incorrect not to conceal. Mao's speech had a powerful influence among writers in the liberated areas, where those who engaged in a literature of exposure such as Ding Ling had to apologize for their mistakes.

In 1943, an article entitled "The Healthy Demand of New Heroism, New Romanticism and New Literature" appeared,[46] in which the writer

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[45]. Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong xuanji* (Selected works of Mao Zedong) vol. 3 (Beijing: Renmin Press, 1953), pp. 849-878.

[46]. Shang Guanzheng, "Xin yingxiong zhuyi, xin langman zhuyi, he xinwenxue zhi jiankang yaoqiu" (New heroism, new romanticism and the healthy demand of new literature) in Qian Liqun (ed.), *Ershi shiji Zhongguo xiaoshuo lilun ziliao* (Fiction theories in the twentieth century China), vol. 4 (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Press, 1997) pp.172-179.

declared that "heroism is the theme of new romanticism . . . . The new heroes of the new romanticism . . . may sometimes be *mystified or idolized* . . . The new heroism of the new romanticism . . . is will-powered and active; to the thought movement of the time, it is correctly progressive and instructive."[47] Such heroic literature was not simply to meet the patriotic demands of war, but was itself an instrument of ideology, and as such, it was to carry on well into the New China.

In 1953 Zhou Yang, then Minister of the Cultural Ministry of China, made a speech to clarify socialist realism at a national conference of writers and artists. According to him, "socialist realism first of all demands our writers to familiarize themselves with the new life of the people, to represent the progressive members among them and their new feelings and new thoughts."[48] He declares that

> the strength and significance of socialist realism lies in its ability and duty to dig out and represent the ordinary people's noble spirit, their typical, positive characters, and to create artistic images worthy of imitation and emulation by the people.[49]

If didacticism makes socialist realism a new version of "writing as the vehicle of the Way" in a narrow understanding of the phrase, Zhou Yang explicitly complements socialist realism with "appropriate concealment",

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[47]. Ibid., italics mine.

[48]. Zhou Yang, "Wei chuangzhao genduo de youxiu de wenxue yishu zuoping er fendou" (Striving for more excellent works of art and literature) in Hong Zicheng (ed.), *Ershi shiji Zhongguo xiaoshuo lilun ziliao* (Fiction theories in the twentieth century China), vol. 5 (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Press, 1997), p. 86.

[49]. Ibid.

as he says, after defining heroes as worthy persons with only minor shortcomings,

> In order to bring the splendid qualities of a hero to prominence, it is feasible and necessary that our writers consciously neglect some of his minor shortcomings so that he could become an ideal character admirable by the masses.[50]

The mystification and idolization of typical heroes culminated in the Cultural Revolution when the principle for literary creation was simply to make "noble, great and perfect" proletarian heroes/heroines. Consequently, such heroes and heroines appear in the model plays and revolutionary novels during this period, with one hero in a novel simply named Gao Daquan,[51] which literally means "noble, great, and perfect" and can be seen as a striking example of typification by wishful naming. Of the eight revolutionary model plays, the only achievement of the performing arts during a decade of cultural revolution, seven have proletarian heroines, the "daughters of the Party," who, with no husbands or lovers, are dedicated to revolution and never bother about emotional problems or any other personal concerns. Apart from their outer appearance (and even that does not show much sexual difference) the heroines bear no other sexual characteristics. They are defeminized revolutionary models, functioning to promote a heroic utopian cause.

What I have outlined in the above evolved under the CCP's principle about art and literature called "revolutionary romanticism combined with

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[50]. Ibid. p. 88.

[51]. The Chinese character for *gao* here stands for *gaoshang*, meaning "noble"; *da* here stands for *weida*, meaning "great"; *quan* here stands for *wanquan*, meaning "perfect".

revolutionary realism", which can be seen as a continuation of the Confucian "appropriate concealment" combined with Soviet socialist realism.[52] Aiming at heroic grandeur, this literature and its literary history cope with women's stories in three ways by which "appropriate concealment" is practiced.

The first way of the "appropriate concealment" is simply to conceal the woman writer entirely as if she had not existed at all. Modern Chinese women's literature emerged as part of modern Chinese literature, but in a number of books about the history of the so-called "modern Chinese literature" women writers are either given inadequate space with superficial misreading or simply canceled out.[53] The most striking sacrifice on the altar of the history of modern Chinese literature is Zhang Ailing (also known as Eiling Chang; 1920-95), whom C.T. Hsia regards as "not only the best and most important writer in Chinese today; her short stories alone invite valid comparisons with, and in some respects claim superiority over, the works of serious modern women writers in English: Katherine Mansfield, Katherine Ann Porter, Eudora Welty, and Carson McCullers."[54] I am here referring to two influential textbooks on the history of modern Chinese literature for tertiary students majoring in Chinese literature. One is Wang Yao's *A Draft History of China's New*

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[52]. Apart from the mainstream literature there were centrifugal literary discourses as well, such as those represented by Qian Zhongshu and Shen Congwen. However, like other writers who could not adjust themselves to the new literary principle, both Qian and Shen stopped creative writing after the founding of the PRC in 1949.

[53]. The term "modern Chinese literature" here follows the conventional periodization (see footnote 7) as the books on the history of modern Chinese literature to be discussed below stick to this periodization.

[54]. C. T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction: 1917-1957* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1961; second printing, 1962), p. 389.

Literature [55] and the other is *The History of Modern Chinese Literature,* the latter a collective work with the well-known scholar Tang Tao as editor.[56] The former was written during the late forties to early fifties. Comparatively speaking, the writer did not suffer much political interference when writing the book, therefore, according to a major critic,

> The collection of primary materials is rather comprehensive and the commentaries are also fair. It became the first book for studying the history of modern Chinese literature for several generations. . . . And compared with other books on the same subject published later, this one remains the best.[57]

However, in spite of all such praise, if this book "fails to give appropriate commentaries" to some male writers outside the mainstream, it does not bother to mention Zhang Ailing at all. The silence on Zhang Ailing remains unchanged in Tang Tao's book as well.

Although both books share a strong orthodox political line, the silence on Zhang Ailing requires explanation beyond orthodox political reasons, because both books include "mandarin ducks and butterfly" writers (writers of formularized, popular love fiction) and writers who degenerated into "traitors" during the Resistance War Against Japan such as Zhang Ziping and Zhou Zuoren. Zhang Ailing was neither a "traitor"

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[55]. Wang Yao, *Zhongguo xin wenxue shigao* (A draft history of China's new literature) Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Press, revised edition, 5th printing, 1982, Shanghai: 1985.

[56]. The book has a three-volume version in Chinese published in Beijing in 1979 and a single-volume English version published by Beijing Foreign Languages Press in 1993; the former version also has Yan Jiayan as co-editor while the latter has Tang Tao alone as editor. Neither version mentions Zhang Ailing, but my quotations will be from the latter.

[57]. Chen Sihe, " Yiben wenxueshi de gouxiang" (Outline of the structure of a book on the history of Chinese literature) in Chen Guoqiu (ed.), *Zhongguo wenxueshi de fansi*

nor a mediocre love story writer, which means she deserves better attention than the two male writers mentioned above. I could think of no other reason than that Zhang Ailing lived with a married man of letters who was also a "traitor" official before their informal (unacknowledged) marriage and that she wrote mostly about women, concentrating on womanly details and displaying no heroic romanticism. It must have been embarrassing for the orthodox literary historians to face a woman writer's "amoral" life style and out of their range of consideration to comment on women's stories with their feminine details far removed from the fore-front of national political struggle. In other words, they felt insecure and unsure about Zhang Ailing, who was too much an other, so they just turned a blind eye to her existence and her influence in modern Chinese literature.[58] Zhang Ailing together with her feminine details was thus "appropriately concealed" from literary history.

The second way of the "appropriate concealment" is to neglect the expressions of female consciousness and/or turn the work under review into an inadequate story compared to the heroic norm through a gender-blinded reading. Both Ding Ling (1904-1985) and Xiao Hong (1911-1942), two of the other most well-known women writers in modern Chinese literature apart from Zhang Ailing, also suffered this kind of treatment.[59]

(Reflection on the history of Chinese literature) (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co. Ltd, 1993), p. 59.

[58]. Apart from C. T. Hsia's *Modern Chinese Fiction*, for critical reviews of Zhang Ailing, one may also read *Women and Chinese Modernity* by Rey Chow, pp. 112 -120; *Fuchu lishi dibiao* (Floating out of the horizon of history) by Men Yue & Dai Jinhua, pp. 245-262.

[59]. For critical reviews of Ding Ling's writing, one may read Tani. E. Barlow's "Introduction" to *I Myself Am a Woman: Selected Writings of Ding Ling* edited by Tani. E. Barlow (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989); Yi-tsi M. Feuerwerker, "The Changing Relationship between Literature and Life" in *Modern Chinese Literature in the May*

Both Wang and Tang's books give less than one page to Xiao Hong. Unlike Zhang Ailing who is a writer of city life, the decadent feudalistic aristocratic family, and women, Xiao Hong writes more about the poor and ignorant people in rural life. Having been victimized by the patriarchal family herself Xiao Hong shows a strong female consciousness without self-pity. Her best known novella "The Field of Life and Death" (Shengsi chang)[60] based on her own bodily experience of imposed pregnancy and procreation parallels country women's lives with that of animals - they come to the world to toil, to give birth, and to die.[61] Far more complex than a book that just "shows the suffering and struggle of the masses after Japanese imperialists occupied the northeast,"[62] it gives emphatic expression to the heavy inertia of peasants' life, especially to women's miseries as they suffer also from their men. Xiao Hong's well-known autobiographical novella "Tales of Hulan River" (Hulanhe zhuan), with its most shocking event of a child-bride being tortured to death by her mother-in-law under the watch of curious villagers, is criticized for "lack of active spirit", and for failing to bring out "the feudalistic exploitation and oppression as well as the

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Fourth Era, ed. by Merle Goldman (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1977); C. T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction: 1917-1957*; Meng Yue & Dai Jinhua, *Fuchu lishi dibiao* (Floating out of the horizon of history), especially pp. 118-139. For commentary on Xiao Hong, one may also read Meng Yue & Dai Jinhua, especially pp. 174-199.

60. All Xiao Hong's works mentioned here are from Yu Qi (ed.), *Xiao Hong xiaoshuo quanji* (A complete collection of Xiao Hong's works). Beijing: Zhongguo Wenlian Chuban Gongsi, 1996.

61. For a feminist reading of the story, one may read Liu He, "Chongfan shengsichang" (Return to the field of life and death) in *Xingbie yu Zhongguo* (*Gender and China*) ed. By Li Xiaojiang, Zhu Hong and Dong Xiuyu. Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co. Ltd, 1993.

62. Tang Tao, *The History of Modern Chinese Literature* (Beijing: Beijing Foreign Languages Press, 1993), p. 349.

sanguinary invasion by the Japanese invaders."[63] Indeed, Xiao Hong's writing of peasant life is out of pace with the heroic literature in which peasants are invariably described in a process of awakening and fighting. Her lived experience of the female body not belonging to the female agent herself leads her to a vision of the animalian order of the peasants' psyche, which is yet to obtain subjectivity. Tuned in to the heroic, patriotic literature of the time, the critics are blind to the emphasized sufferings of women and Xiao Hong's particular vision of the national unconsciousness (which is mainly that of the peasants). This kind of phallocentric criticism, blind to gender oppression, is also applied to Ding Ling, whose life and writings are the most dramatic of repression of women's literature since after the May Fourth Movement to the beginning of the Cultural Revolution.

One of Ding Ling's most provocative stories is "When I Was In Xia Village" (Wo zai xiacun de shihou, 1941).[64] The story depicts a young woman, Zhenzhen, who is raped by Japanese soldiers and subsequently forced to serve the invaders as a prostitute but, in the meantime, also works for the revolutionary army by providing information about the enemy. However, this story of obvious female consciousness is briefly introduced in Tang's book by dropping the sexual issue: "Ding Ling portrayed a young woman named Zhenzhen who lived in a village near the front. In spite of being tortured after being imprisoned by the Japanese invaders, Zhengzhen insisted on sending information to the anti-Japanese

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[63]. Wang Yao, *Zhongguo xin wenxue shigao* (A draft history of China's new literature), p. 481.

[64]. All Ding Ling's stories discussed here are from Tani E Barlow (ed.), *I Myself Am a Woman: Selected Writings of Ding Ling.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1989.

troops, showing her courage."[65] Wang's book gives the story even fewer lines in a language even vaguer: the story "tells about the splendor of a little girl who lives in a backward village. The girl gains new strength in humiliation and torture; she leaves her home for a new place where she can study."[66] Both commentaries avoided the touchy question concerning a woman's political loyalty and her sexual chastity. With the same gender blindness, they also smothered Ding Ling's highly provocative essay "Thoughts on March 8" (1942), not mentioning it at all.

The best and truly "appropriate" way of concealment is, however, to let the woman writer conceal what is "inappropriate" herself. If the mainstream literary discourse could do nothing about those who were too much an other (such as Zhang Ailing) or those who were never a real follower (such as Xiao Hong), its power is most effective on Ding Ling, "the daughter of the May Fourth movement". Ding Ling started her writing career as a rebellious, highly personal woman writer but ended up as a dedicated propagandist. Gradually reducing her individuality to naught, her published stories as a whole represent the CCP's transformation of "woman" into an abstract, ideological category. Her transformation is not rare and singular but representative of the transformation of a generation of Chinese writers who contributed to the bulk of the mainstream literature.

In her first phase of writing (1926-29), Ding Ling was primarily concerned with probing the meaning of life in bold feminine and

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[65]. Tang Tao, *The History of Modern Chinese Literature*, p. 312.

[66]. Wang Yao. *Zhongguo xin wenxue shigao* (A draft history of China's new literature), p. 449.

autobiographical terms: the stories in her first collection, *In the Darkness* (1928), notably "Meng Ke" and "The Diary of Miss Sophia," represent the erotic desire of young women and their search for an independent, meaningful life in a hostile society which offers them nothing but the new male chauvinist family centered on the bourgeois or petty bourgeois husband. Feng Xuefeng, the leader of the League of the Left Wing Writers Association, criticized the early Ding Ling as a "writer with a bad ideological tendency," who reflected in her stories "her own alienated, hopeless, individualistic anarchism."[67] In a way Feng was right. Mainstream Chinese literature did not provide the space for individuality and gender specificity. Ding Ling subsequently lined up with "literary massification" campaign. In 1930 she published "Water," which narrates the beginnings of a peasant uprising in the wake of a major flood. The story was acclaimed as a model of the new literature. And Feng Xuefeng, referring to this story, emphatically pointed out that "The revolutionary route Ding Ling has gone through is from isolation from society to returning to society, from individual nihilism to identification with the masses of workers and peasants."[68] And he further emphasized the need for writers to fight against their "bad tendencies and bad habits" and to "thoroughly reform themselves."[69]

In 1931 Ding Ling joined the CCP, and in the same year her husband Hu Yeping, a writer and a Party member, was arrested and killed by the

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[67]. See Wu Fuhui (ed.), *Ershi shiji Zhongguo xiaoshuo lilun ziliao* (Fiction theories in the twentieth century China), vol. 3, (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Press, 1997), p. 171.

[68]. Ibid.

[69]. Ibid.

Nationalist government. The death of her husband made her more determined to pursue the communist cause. However, on her path of self-reform, her early feminist tendency did reflect itself in her works such as "In the Hospital," "When I Was in Xia Village," and "Thoughts on March 8." These works were criticized and were among the major writings that triggered off Mao's "Talks at Yan'an Forum on Literature and Arts," and Ding Ling ended up making apologies and showing a greater determination to reform herself. Her further self-reform resulted in her novel *The Sun Shines Over Sanggan River*, a novel serves the CCP's land reform policy around the turn of the 50s. After Liberation in 1949 Ding Ling enjoyed a number of ranking titles and was involved in power struggle. In 1957 she was labeled a rightist and sent to reform in a remote rural area. Accepting this punishment she said "I am willing to be a cog of the Party and revolution; I am willing to go wherever the Party sends me and do whatever the Party wants me to do."[70] Her last published story "Du Wanxiang," written before the Cultural Revolution but published in 1978, reincarnates Ding Ling's "cog" spirit. Barlow's commentary on the story is quite to the point:

> This allegory of Du Wangxiang who "served the Party heart and soul," is Ding Ling's final, haunting glance back to the problem that in the end was her most sustained concern in a long and eventful life. The 1978 parable memorializes the author's own history in the Chinese revolution. It is clearly meant to provide a correct interpretation of, if nothing else, the writer's unimpeachable

[70].Quoted from Lin Danya, *Dangdai Zhongguo nüxing wenxue shilun* (On contemporary Chinese women's literary history) (Xiamen: Xiamen Daxue Press, 1995), p. 143.

> motives. . . . Du Wangxiang makes concrete Ding Ling's own measure of the socialist woman . . . [71]

Barlow, however, overlooked an important aspect of Du Wanxiang's life story – she had no love nor did she really live a family life. With the concealment of those important details of women's narrative, the socialist new woman came to the scene and Ding Ling turned herself into a loyal daughter of the CCP. In the process, female consciousness was totally repressed, if not entirely concealed in Chinese literature.

Woman and Details: Desublimating the Grand Narrative

Contemporary Chinese women's fiction begins with love and the family, which constitutes, as I read it, an anti-concealment strategy. This anti-concealment strategy is not used to reveal any ultimate truth about Chinese women (because there is none), but to display female consciousness through cracks, in or between details, which erode the grand narratives with sensuality, triviality, frivolity, fragmentation, unintelligibility, and parody. "Details here are defined", to borrow from Rey Chow,

> as the sensuous, trivial, and superfluous textual presences that exist in an ambiguous relation with some larger "vision" such as reform and revolution, which seeks to subordinate them but which is displaced by their surprising returns.[72]

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[71]. Tani. E. Barlow (ed.), *I Myself Am a Woman: Selected Writings of Ding Ling*, p. 329.

[72]. Rey Chow, *Women and Chinese Modernity: the Politics of Reading between West and East* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 85.

Zhang Ailing, whom I discussed previously, anticipated the modern politics of the detail as discussed by Roland Barthes and Naomi Schor, which serves as a useful clue in reading fiction by contemporary Chinese women writers.

Zhang Ailing had a well-demonstrated sharp distaste for received dogma. In the opinion of many leftist critics, her writings are "frivolous", with "formal peculiarities . . . the excessive, self-indulgent rendering of sensuous details and a tendency towards fragmentation".[73] Indeed, as Rey Chow also points out,

> The commonly recognized sensual refinement of Zhang's writings, in which 'big' historical issues tend to recede into the background . . . stands as the opposite extreme of the "revolutionariness" that we often associate with modernity that Chinese modernism seeks between "inner subjectivity" and "new nation."[74]

However, Zhang Ailing never used the word "detail" to defend her writing. Instead, she emphasized the word "irrelevant". Speaking against the background of Confucian historiography and the mainstream literary discourse, Zhang Ailing expressed her "private" wish that "historians speak more irrelevant words," because

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[73]. Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang, "Yuan Qiongqiong and the Rage for Eileen Zhang among Taiwan's *Feminine* Writers" in Tani E. Barlow (ed.), *Gender Politics in Modern China*, p. 227.

[74]. Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The politics of Reading Between East and West*, p. 120.

> a clear cut and adamant outlook of the universe, be it about philosophy or politics, always makes people disgusted. The so-called "pleasure" of life lies entirely in those irrelevant things.[75]

These "irrelevant things" in Zhang Ailing's fiction consists of instances of "pure love of material life", such as "getting married," and "rediscovery of the pleasure of food" in a war-ridden city.[76] If Zhang expressed a feminine point of view about history, then Kristeva strikes a similar note, when she declares that "women's knowledge is corporeal, aspiring to pleasure rather than tribal unity."[77] For Kristeva's metaphor of "tribal unity" here points to things such as philosophy or politics, in whose margin women have unexpectedly identified a corporeal pleasure in "irrelevant things".

Barthes also expressed nearly the same fondness of irrelevant things when he felt it an irritation that "the well-meaning editor" (not a historian but "another person foreclosing pleasure") had seen fit to omit from Amiel "the everyday details, what the weather was like on the shores of Lake Geneva, and retain only insipid moral musing."[78] He also cited a sentence of irrelevant things that gave him pleasure: "Clothes, sheets, napkins were hanging vertically, attached by wooden clothes pins to taut lines."[79]

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[75]. Zhang Ailing, "Jinyu lu" (Record of ciders and ashes) in Qian Liqun (ed.), *Ershishiji Zhongguo xiaoshuo lilun ziliao* (Fiction theories in the twentieth century China), vol. 4, p. 249.

[76]. Zhang Ailing, "Ziji de wenzhang" (My own writing) in Qian Liqun (ed.), *Ershishiji Zhongguo xiaoshuo lilun ziliao* (Fiction theories in the twentieth century China), vol. 4, p. 288.

[77]. Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, trans. Anita Barrows (London: Scribner, 1977), p. 18.

[78]. Roland Barthes, *Pleasure of the text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, twentieth printing, 1995), p. 54.

[79]. Ibid., p. 26.

Barthes's fondness of everyday details points to a "change of mode" - switching from sublimation to desublimation hinged on the materiality of life. As he reasoned: "it is this weather [on the shores of Lake Geneva] that has not aged, not Amiel's philosophy."[80]

Likewise, for Zhang Ailing such a mode of writing is rooted in the materiality of life. As she defended the content of her stories: "I come to describe them because there are such kind of things."[81] A number of Zhang's famous stories are manifestly based on her lived experience, which often provided prototypes of her characters.[82] Writing from lived experience does not follow a single dimensional order, because "reality has no system," which is, as young Ailing, explaining her work in the 1940s, said, "like several radios turned on at the same time, each singing its own tune, forming a chaos."[83] Barthes expressed again almost the same sense of fragmentation by the very form of his autobiography *Roland Barthes*, which consists of fragments of reminiscences and bits of thoughts not strung together nor organized into a coherent story. In this autobiography, he unabashedly confessed his painting method of proceeding "by addition" instead of schematizing a whole picture beforehand.[84] Moreover, he

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[80]. Ibid., p. 54.

[81]. Zhang Ailing, "Ziji de wenzhang" (My own writing) in Qian Liqun (ed.), *Ershishiji Zhongguo xiaoshuo lilun ziliao* (Fiction theories in the twentieth century China), vol. 4, p. 287.

[82]. For reference in this respect, one may read "My Sister" by Zhang's younger brother Zhang Zijing in Ji Ji & Guan Hong (eds.), *Yongyuan de Zhang Ailing* (The eternal Zhang Ailing) (Shanghai: Xuelin Press, 1996).

[83]. Zhang Ailing, "Jin yu lu" (Record of cinders and ashes) in Qian Liqun (ed.), *Ershishiji Zhongguo xiaoshuo lilun ziliao* (Fiction theories in the twentieth century China), vol. 4, p. 248.

[84]. Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, trans. Richard Howard (Macmillan Press, 1995), p. 93.

compared fragmentation to "the musical idea of a song cycle: each piece is self-sufficient, and yet is never anything but the interstice of its neighbors."[85] However, if in Barthes's comparison "the 'development' of the music would be counted by 'tone'", Zhang Ailing's imagination of simultaneous singing of several irrelevant "tones" conveys an even more radical sense of fragmentation, which entertains no ideal of "thought, or of wisdom, or of truth (as in the Maxim)."[86]

Understandably, Zhang Ailing's insight of fragmentary reality and of life's pleasure in "irrelevant things" led her to disagree with the orthodox heroic romanticism, which advocated a heroic theme before everything else. She held that "ordinary people are more representative of the sum total of the age than are heroes."[87] She insisted that "fiction writing is story telling and should let the story talk; this is much better than fixing a theme and then creating a story according to the theme."[88] Against the heroic theme, Zhang wrote:

> I found that writers always emphasize the heroic grandeur of life but neglect its prosaic stability; actually the latter is the background of the former. ... Although the prosaic stability is often incomplete and would be destroyed now and then, it has a significance of eternity. It exists in all times. It is the godly nature of human beings and can also be seen as the *feminine* nature of life.[89]

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[85]. Ibid., p. 94.

[86]. Ibid., p. 94.

[87]. Zhang Ailing, "Ziji de wenzhang" (My own writing) in Qian Liqun (ed.), *Ershishiji Zhongguo xiaoshuo lilun ziliao* (Fiction theories in the twentieth century China), vol. 4, p. 285.

[88]. Ibid., p. 286.

[89]. Ibid., p. 283 (italics mine).

The word "feminine" can be understood as the other of the heroic grandeur, or again in Barthes' words, the other of the "insidious heroism".[90] Likewise, Kristeva considers "what woman desires is the opposite of the sublimating word."[91] In this light, Zhang's emphasis on "irrelevant things" is "on the contrary [to 'heroism in our languages'] like a sudden obliteration of the warrior *value*, a momentary desquamation of the writer's hackles, a suspension of the 'heart' (of courage)."[92]

The meaning of Zhang Ailing's "irrelevant things" is also identifiable with that of the detail defined as "the sensuous, trivial, and superfluous textual presences"[93] For both the "irrelevant things" and details are centrifugal elements. If utopianism is a construct arrived at by conceptual means, then the "irrelevant" detail is a construct arrived at through perceived and lived experience. The utopian language has a notorious lack of details. To make a story part of the master narrative, all sensual details which are likely to arouse consciousness of the body and thus to block the royal road to the utopian have to be removed.[94] As Naomi Schor wrote: "Details are incompatible with the ideal because of their material

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[90]. Barthes wrote: "Still far too much heroism in our languages; in the best . . . an erethism of certain expressions and finally a kind of *insidious heroism*." See *Pleasure of the Text* p. 30.

[91]. Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, trans. Anita Barrows (London: Scribner, 1977), p. 22.

[92]. Roland Barthes, *Pleasure of the text*, trans. p. 30.

[93]. Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The politics of Reading Between East and West*, p. 85.

[94]. Men Yue presents an excellent analysis of such removal in the classic revolutionary story "Baimaonü" (The white-haired girl). See "Female Images and National Myth" in Tani E. Barlow (ed.), *Gender Politics in Modern China.*

contingency; details subvert the Sublime because of their tendency to proliferation."[95]

While feminist theorists connect the detail with the body and the corporeal, Bakhtin may have long incorporated the detail in his dialogism. Indeed, in his *Rabelais and His World* Bakhtin paid special attention to bodily details and valued them highly. In Bakhtinian language one may say that the modern aesthetic imperative of the detail is "a function of the deepening of the dialogic essence. . . . Dialogue moves into the deepest molecular and, ultimately, subatomic levels."[96] The function of the dialogic deepening in the novel "registers with extreme subtlety the tiniest shifts and oscillations of the social atmosphere."[97] In this connection, "*xiaoshuo*", the Chinese word for novel, with its literal meaning of "small talk" originally to register street gossip reflecting social atmosphere, bears historical witness to the novel's anti-authoritative orientation as well as an epistemological imperative bodied forth in details.

Thus, as a structural thread running through my thesis, female consciousness is read in the detail. As the orthodox influence recedes from women writers' texts, the details proliferate. Part One of my thesis traces the change of female consciousness in the discourse of love. The process begins with a historical examination of sexual relationships in marriage customs followed by an investigation into the meaning of the word "love" (*ai*) in Chinese, and then moves to women's texts that call for love, and

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[95]. Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail* (London: Methuen & Co., 1987), p. 7.

[96]. M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist; ed. M. Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 300.

also those that are a parody of love romance. In this process, female consciousness achieves a measure of freedom as it denounces love romance and asserts the power of female agency over the female body. Part Two explores the social, familial, and moral dilemmas in which the fictional heroines find themselves. While the women writers see no way out, their female consciousness presents a negative stance towards the status quo. Part Three discusses new paradic narratives and the stylistic changes hinging on the (feminine) detail in women writers' discourses, which demonstrates female consciousness as informative of the new narratives. In all the three parts, the thesis endeavors to demonstrate a female consciousness profoundly related to engaged reality.

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[97]. Ibid.

Part One

Female Consciousness: the Discourse of Love

Contemporary Chinese women writers emerged together with stories of love after the Cultural Revolution.[1] The inter-connection between women writers and love stories lies in women's historical location within the private sphere, where they are wives who are supposed to love and attend on their men, and in romantic literature, where they exist for love. Yet after a whole decade of taboo on the theme of love, the re-emergence of love stories was more than a phenomenon of passion. The early love stories represent a humanist critique of a loveless revolutionary age. Yet, because humanism has been basically

[1]. While such a coincidence is an accepted fact to those who are familiar with contemporary Chinese literature, I would like to quote two statements here to support the simultaneous emergence of women writers and stories of love. Lai-fong Leung noted that "[o]ne striking feature of the Post-Mao Chinese literary scene is the emergence of an unprecedented number of women writers." (see "In Search of Love and Self: the Image of Young Female Intellectuals in Post-Mao Women's Fiction" in Michael S. Duke (ed.), *Chinese Women Writers: Critical Appraisals* (New York and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1989), p. 135. Kam Louie also observed: "After more than a decade of silence on the topic of love, the Chinese literary scene had, by the end of 1980, seen the emergence of hundreds of stories with love themes." See Kam Louie, *Between Fact and Fiction: Essays on Post-Mao Chinese Literature and Society* (Sydney: Wild Peony, 1989), p. 49.

phallocentric, a critical female consciousness informs a large number of love stories by women writers, which proves that women writers were but "fellow travelers" of their male peers in the humanist tradition.[2] This female consciousness enables women writers to write differently, especially on the theme of love.

This part investigates the representations of female consciousness in the fiction of love by contemporary Chinese women writers from after the Cultural Revolution till the middle of the 1990s. I shall first trace the socio-historical and cultural background, necessary for reading women writers' love stories, and then demonstrate how the contemporary love stories emerged in an orthodox political frame, through whose cracks a female consciousness emerges in textual interventions. The last chapter of this part delineates the female consciousness within the discourse of love in what may be called the personal domain. This is the proper area of love where the true love object is shown, the female body reclaimed, and desires expressed. However, if desire indicates lack and consequently disillusion, then my investigation necessarily explores the parodic stories of love, which discharge the heroine of love from the discourse and draws a period for my discussion in this part.

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[2]. Chen Xiaoming (ed.), *Zhongguo nüxing xiaoshuo jingxuan (*Selected stories by Chinese female writers*)* (Lanzhou: Gansu Renmin Press, 1994), p. 2.

Chapter One

Love in the Chinese Context

To proceed with such an investigation, the first problem that needs to be discussed is the meaning of love: what does it mean in Chinese culture and for Chinese women writers in general?

Sexual love in the Chinese cultural order can be seen as being divided into two layers: the spiritual and the amorous. In my discussion of this chapter, the spiritual includes romantic love and the amorous is focused on a more distinctively carnal satisfaction. While there is no clear demarcation between the two forms of love because they are both realizations of desire and none excludes the other completely, the two forms of love are distinguishable in Chinese literary discourse. A typical representation can be seen in Wang Anyi's novella "The Story of Uncle" (Shushu de gushi, 1990),[3] in which the male protagonist, a writer called Uncle by the narrator, has two mistresses at the same time: an intellectual woman in her thirties and a younger non-intellectual woman. Uncle maintains an exclusively spiritual love with the former, and a carnal love with the latter. He drives away his loneliness and discharges his anxiety in carnal pleasure with the younger woman and purifies his spirit in verbal

[3]. A reprinting of the story can be read in Wang Anyi, *Shangxin Taipingyang* (Sadness over the Pacific). Beijing: Huayi Press, 1996.

communication with the intellectual woman. Discontented, both women leave him. Symbolically, their departure from the male writer points to a female desire for love as spiritual, emotional, and physical all at once. Such is the love that the women writers' heroines search for in the discussion of later chapters.

Feminine Grief: Entering the Conjugal Area of Love

This kind of love has little to do with the institution of marriage and family, which entered history in order to guarantee the purity of offspring and the inheritance of private property, as well as to prevent procreation between close relatives. In ancient China, marriage was also arranged to create a good relationship between two families (*he liang xing zhi hao*) as a strategy to combine group power and benefit. Thus marriage was predominantly social. Refracting this social reality, the Chinese word *hunyin* for marriage is semantically father-dominant. According to the dictionary, the character *hun* means the father of the bride, and *yin* (in *hunyin*) means the father of the bridegroom.[4] The combination of two fathers represented by *hun* and *yin* into one word to name marriage ironically indicates the sexual union as a matter for the patriarchs.

As men are fathers or potential fathers, marriage was established to serve male interest. This was recognized in the Chinese language. The ancient Chinese poem "Four Events of Great Happiness" cites marriage as one happy event together with three others: rain after draught, unexpected reunion with old friends on a journey, and success in national scholar-official examinations.[5] Except for the rain, which has a universal tone, the "happiness" of the other three events was entirely male-defined. For women did not have independent

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[4]. See *Gu Hanyu changyongzi zidian* (Dictionary of frequently used classical Chinese words). Beijing: Commercial Press, 1993.

[5]. Ma Zhixiao, *Zhongguo de hunsu* (The marriage custom in China) (Changsha: Yuelu Shushe, 1988), p. 68.

mobility and were excluded from imperial examinations. Marriage put a woman into the servitude of a man and his family. The event of marriage was a milestone in a man's lifelong journey of manhood, comparable to his success in becoming a government official through imperial examinations. It remains till this day a means to measure a man's success in Chinese society, and is indeed a happy event for most men.

Marriage, however, may not be a happy event for women. If folkloric custom refracts consciousness and the unconscious of humanity, we can see a conscious or unconscious female grief over getting married. As *Book of Rites* (*Liji*) prescribes: "Male and female, without the intervention of the matchmaker, do not know each other's name." (Vol. 1) To leave one's natal family and become a strange man's wife was sad for a woman; the prospect of servitude to the unknown husband and his family was distressing. According to the *Book of Rites* (*Liji*), the female's family would burn candles for three days in succession to mourn the daughter's impending departure.[6] The modern form of such a custom is "crying before wedding" (*kujia*). In this modern form the bride would weep or cry loudly before she is taken away to the bridegroom's home for wedding. In Guangdong and Guangxi, the bride's girlfriends would come to the bride's home to mourn and weep together for three days. The girls would improvise songs, which contrast the bride's happy girlhood with her future sufferings as wife in the husband's family. When the bridegroom's family send people to take the bride, the girls may even let out their anger by scolding those people and the go-between.[7]

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[6]. See Du Fangqin, *Nüxing guannian de yanbian* (The change of the female concept) (Zhengzhou: Henan Renmin Press, 1988), p. 46.

[7]. Ma Zhixiao, *Zhongguo de hunsu* (The marriage custom in China), p. 70.

Unaware of institutionalized gender oppression in the institution of marriage and family, Ma Zhixiao finds this custom puzzling. He points out that this custom in modern times has become more of a show than genuine expression of sadness.

> The custom of a bride's crying before her wedding has become wide spread all over China in recent times. It is no longer limited in Guangdong and Guangxi. For example in the remote Chi County there is also such a custom. The more loudly and sadly the bride cries, the better. Otherwise, people would jeer at the bride for forgetting her parents, or at least, for her sexual desire which makes her take a wedding as a happy event. The bride apparently cries unrestrainedly, but she actually sheds no tears, only making a noise for show.[8]

He further refers to anthropologic and folkloric opinions to explain the custom. Two reasons are provided. First, the custom was meant to deceive wicked ghosts. According to this reason, marriage is a very happy event and thus may cause jealousy from ghosts. To guarantee the safety of the bride, the custom to show sadness was established to prevent jealousy from the ghosts so that they would not interfere. Second, and more reasonably, according to Ma Zhixiao, the custom can be seen as a legacy from the "plunder marriage" of primitive society. In primitive times, when a man had a sexual urge he would go out to take a woman by force, and she would naturally cry out of fear.[9] Hence the custom of female crying before wedding.

From a feminist point of view, neither reason can explain the continuation of such a custom. Particularly, it cannot explain the concrete content of the crying over a bleak future of suffering as a wife in the husband's family.

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[8]. Ibid., p. 72.

[9]. Ibid., p. 72-73.

Whether the bride's grief is genuine or not (it may not be genuine, especially if she lives a wretched life in her natal family), the continuation of the custom points to a collective female consciousness or unconscious, (which varies according to individual cases) of the unfortunate fate of being a wife in the traditional Chinese family, where she is a virtual slave and reproductive instrument.

Looking into a wider range of texts, we may see this female custom as a reaction to the Confucian social and familial order. This order prescribes the relationship of husband and wife as an absolutely hierarchical model and foundation for Chinese society. As Confucian doctrines clearly state:[10]

> Marriage begins the human world . . . . Once [a woman is] married, she is fixed for life. Therefore she will not marry again when her husband dies. When the man goes to get his bride, the man proceeds before the woman. This is what firmness and gentleness mean, the same as heaven before earth and the emperor before his subjects.
>
> . . . .
>
> Walking out of the gate, the man leads the woman and the woman follows the man, hereafter begins the way of husband and wife. A woman is a person who obeys men. When young she obeys her father and elder brother, when married she obeys her husband, after her husband dies she obeys her son. (*Liji zhushu*, vol. 26)

> A father is heaven for his son; a husband is heaven for his wife. (*Yili zhushu*, vol. 36)

> The way of gentlemen derives from that of husband and wife. (*Zhongyong*, chapter 12)

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[10]. The following quotations of Confucian doctrines are quoted from Mei Jialing, "Hanjin shige zhong sifu wenben de xingcheng ji qi xiangguan wenti" (The formation of the "pining women texts" in the Han-Jin poetry and other relative problems) in Zhong Huiling (ed.), *Nüxing zhuyi yu Zhongguo wenxue* (Feminism and Chinese literature). Taibei: Liren Shuju, 1997. Translation of the quotations is mine.

Since the "way of gentlemen" was the way society was maintained, women's inferiority was absolutely necessary to keep the social order. Therefore, the principle of *"yang's* superiority over yin's inferiority" (*yinbei yangzun*) reconfirms women's "absolute" inferiority:

> Men, even though of humble origin, are all *yang;* women, even though of noble origin, are all *yin.* (*Sibu beiyao,* vol. 11)

For women to get married was to enter into the way of husband and wife and to be deeply oppressed as the Other. A conscious or unconscious awareness of this reality must be an important cause that provokes women's weeping before wedding.

One must admit, however, there is a humanitarian element in the traditional marriage of the Confucian social and familial order. For the classic doctrines admit that "food and sex" are "two big human desires". How does Confucianism admit sex in relation to women? According to Liu Xiang's *Biography of Chaste Women* (Lie nü zhuan), Mencius, Confucius' greatest disciple, left his wedding chamber indignantly when he saw his newly married wife not properly dressed in the room. So his wife went to see Mencius' mother and said: "I heard that the way of husband and wife is not kept in the private bedroom. Today when Mencius saw me dressed casually in the bedroom, he became angry and left. He wanted me to stand on ceremony. But as a woman, I am not supposed to stand on ceremony when sleeping with my husband. If Mencius insists on this point, I will go home." Thus Mencius's mother summoned Mencius and told him his wife's opinion, after which Mencius asked his wife to

stay.[11] Zhang Huaichen cited this story and wrote "the story shows that even in feudal society, conjugal love was seen as transcending the law and morality. It needs physical intimacy not rigid politeness."[12] Clearly, such conjugal love is limited in bed only. Once out of bed, the man will resume his master's face and authority. In this "conjugal love", a wife is "loved" as a sexual object and reproductive machine only.

Love in the Changing History

In fact, the sexual relationship as in the case of Mencius and his wife is best described as conjugal duty in the Confucian familial order. For the meaning of love today is different from what it was in traditional China. Semantically, the Chinese word *ai* as a verb for the English verb "love" was not originally identical with the latter. The classical *ai* contains two meanings that the modern vernacular *ai* does not have: 1) to pity or sympathize; 2) to grudge or be stingy. In the meaning of love, the classical *ai* as a verb was used more often than not in a non-romantic way, as in "love one's mother" or "Wu Guang always loved people", to cite two examples given in the dictionaries.[13] However, its meaning of sexual love also appears in referring to adultery or in the Chinese term *en'ai* describing conjugal love.[14] Interestingly, like the two examples cited previously, in the case of adultery, the Chinese word *ai* (love) as a verb also takes a third-

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[11]. Zhang Huaicheng, *Zhongguo de jiating yu lunli* (Family and ethics in China) (Beijing: Zhongguo Renmin Daxue Press, 1993), p. 202.
[12]. Ibid.

[13]. See *Gu Hanyu changyongzi zidian* (Dictionary of frequently used classical Chinese words). Beijing: Commercial Press, 1993; Duan Desen, *Jianming gu Hanyu tongyici cidian* (Concise classical Chinese synonyms dictionary). Taiyuan: Shanxi Jiaoyu Press, 2nd printing, 1994; Guo Xiliang et al., *Gudai Hanyu* (Classical Chinese) (Beijing: Beijing Press, 2nd printing, 1993), p. 100.

[14]. See *Ci Hai* (Shanghai: Shanghai Cishu Press, 1979), p. 1493.

person pronoun as its object. Similar usage of the verb *ai* (love) taking a third-person pronoun as its object appears twice among the dozens of love poems in *Book of Poetry*, the earliest Chinese poetry anthology, in the two lines "I love him in my heart" ("The Mulberry Tree") and "I love her but can't find her" ("A Shepherdess").[15] However, there is a sheer lack of examples showing *ai* (love) taking the pronoun "you" to declare love passions. Compared with western love poems in similarly canonical works of ancient times, such as "Song of Songs" in the Bible, the Chinese expression of love passion is much more reserved. It might be a matter of chance that none of the classical dictionaries and classical Chinese books I have consulted demonstrate the Chinese word *ai* (love) as an active verb for a male subject to express passionate love towards a woman. Nonetheless, given that the Confucian social and familial order imposed an absolute inferiority on women as the base of its hierarchy, one may discern a discursive difficulty for a male subject to declare love to his beloved woman. For him, love is to bestow favor (*en*) on her, a humble slave, so named by terms such as *nu jia* (meaning "your humble servant") and *jian qie* (meaning "your humble concubine" or "your humble wife" used by women to refer to themselves when talking to their husbands).

In classical Chinese, sentiments and emotions, including those related to sexual love, are generally expressed by the noun *qing*, and *qing* expressed as such is supposed to be restrained by the ethical principle *li*. Dorothy Ko points out that *qing* was seen as capable of softening the edges of Confucian obligations so as to achieve a higher level of adherence by working out the utmost loyalty in the subject. In this regard, the ethical principle *li* was considered as the

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[15]. Quoted from Jiang Shenzhang (ed.), *Shi jing* (*Book of poetry*), trans. Xu Yuanchong (Changsha: Hunan Press, 1992); the two poems are respectively from p. 512 and p. 78. I changed Xu Yuanchong's stylized translation to bring out the verb *ai* as it literally is in the original.

"fundamental nature of *qing*".[16] Thus the famous playwright Hong Shen who enthused in *qing* could write in a well-known drama: "Ministers are loyal and sons filial only because their *qing* is sincere to the extreme."[17] Given that such an orderly state was maintained according to the Confucian doctrine of "*san gang wu chang*", meaning the three cardinal codes (ruler guides subject, father guides son, and husband guides wife) and five virtues (benevolence, righteousness, propriety, sincerity, and knowledge), women remained oppressed in this order of *qing*. Moreover, the *qing* of the orthodox ethical principle was supposed not to overrun "the principle and become desire [*yu*], something we should avoid."[18] Thus qing and desire were artificially made to oppose each other. Desire was seen as evil, therefore should be rid of. The legacy of such doctrine can be seen in the old office clerk in Shen Rong's novella "Give You a Bunch of Night Fragrance" (Xian shang yi shu yelaixiang, 1987), who takes the injunction "Do not have desire" (*wuyu*) as his life motto.[19] Linguistically, *qing* is a noun, a container of meaning, which itself does not *act out* the content and therefore cannot transcend the orthodox principle without a certain linguistic transformation. Thus *qing*, in spite of its allowance of romantic sentiments between man and woman and its advocacy of "sincerity of heart", remained subordinated to the Confucian ethical principle.

The liberation of *qing* came with the modern use of the word *ai* in the utterance "I love you" in a sexual relationship and in its compounds *aiqing*, *lian'ai*, both equivalent to the English noun "love". The new linguistic formations

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[16]. Quoted from Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 81.

[17]. Ibid. p. 80.

[18]. Ibid.

[19]. Shen Rong, *Lande lihun* (Too lazy to divorce). Beijing: Huayi Press, 1993.

of *ai* and *qing* began to circulate between 1900-1918,[20] and became popular among the romantic generation of Chinese intellectuals during the May Fourth new cultural movement.[21] This came together with the rise of the vernacular Chinese language to replace classic Chinese language in writing. On the one hand, the new love became a hallmark of personal modernity, on the other, women writers' love discourse was largely governed by an ascetic "ideological strategy", which ensured the nobility of their call for love as faith in freedom, purified of carnal pleasure. Typically, the heroine in "Separation" (Feng Yuanjun, *gejue*)[22] who is brave enough to defy an arranged marriage and choose her own lover, would sleep with him, "talking love" without "making love" so as to safeguard the purity of their feelings. Before love gained a right on its own (instead of being attached to some other nobler cause) the romantic passion became ossified in revolution, as the latter was soon to forbid any romantic love. The liberated women who went to the "red base" Yan'an to make revolution had to marry for Revolution (they could not afford not to marry, nor could they afford to be "choosy"), as Ding Ling, the foremost feminist writer in the 1920s and 1930s, revealed in her famous essay published in 1941.[23] Their marriages

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[20]. Zhang Chanhui, "Bijiao 'Luomi'ou he Zhuliye' yu 'liangzhu' de aiqing guan (Compare the Viewpoints of Love 'Between Romeo and Juliet' and 'Liangzhu') in *Ershiyi shiji (Twenty-first Century*) Hong Kong: 1995: 8. Actually, in a less direct way, *ai* as a verb declaring sexual love appeared in vernacular novels of the Ming Dynasty already. For example, in *Er Pai*, a young lady who falls in love with a scholar says "Who loves you ?" while reading the young man's love letter in which he assumes she loves him. She then tells her maid that "I really love him so." See Ling Mengchu (1580-1644), *Er Pai* (Shenyang: Chunfeng Wenyi Press, 1994), p. 170.

[21]. For a detailed discussion of this romantic generation, see Lee Ou-fan Leo, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1973.

[22]. For a reprinting of the story, see Yan Chunde (ed.), *Nüxing de dipingxian* (The female horizon). Beijing: Zhongguo Wenlian Press, 1995.

[23]. See Ding Ling, "Thoughts on March 8th in her anthology *I Myself Am a Woman: Selected Writings of Ding Ling* (ed. Tani E. Barlow). Boston: Beacon Press, 1989.

with revolutionary cadres were symbolic of the Revolution's appropriation of women as a subordinated group.

After Liberation in 1949, women were required to detach themselves completely from romantic love. The woman writer Zong Pu had to stop creative writing, because her story "Red Peas" (*Hong dou, 1956*) contained a nostalgic feeling towards erstwhile romance and, therefore, was criticized for being "unhealthy".[24] Henceforth, love had to be cemented on the shared ideal of communism.

[24]. For a reprinting of this story, see Li Ziyun (ed.), *Zhongguo Nüxing Xiaoshuo Xuan* (Selected stories of Chinese female writers). Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co., Ltd., 1995.

Chapter Two

Love and Patriarchal Socialism

Deprived of desire, feelings and any other symptoms of sexuality, the discourse of love became a revolutionary myth in new China. As Liu Zaifu, a well-known Chinese critic, points out,

> Love was turned into an instrument to reveal class oppression, or the reason for revolution, or a means by which one could devote oneself to the state and society. The privacy of love was dissolved in the public politics of the nation, society, and revolution. By the 1970s, stories of love generally have no ending, because love was supposed to contribute to the noble and perfect quality of the hero. Therefore, at the beginning of the story love is still describable since the admiration and worship of the hero can be purely spiritual, but it becomes difficult to continue at the stage of marriage, because married life would put the hero into the non-spiritual, private sphere, which would damage his image as a hero. The sexual union is not between two human beings but between a human being [the woman] and a god.[1]

[1]. Li Zehou and Liu Zaifu, *Gaobie geming: Li Zehou and Liu Zaifu duihua lu* (Farewell to revolution: dialogues between Li Zehou and Liu Zaifu) (Hong Kong: Tiandi Tushu Gongsi, 1996), p. 231.

In the typical revolutionary operas produced during the Cultural Revolution, even formularized love no longer exists, and the revolutionary heroines, having no boyfriends or husbands, never "talk love" (a literal translation of the Chinese *tan lianai*). They do not have any private life.

Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua identify such female images as "empty signifiers" (*kongdong de nengzhi*),[2] as if the male images are not "empty" but representations of men as they are. Given that a signifier has a "signified" which is an idea or a concept but not the "real" thing, the female images are not particularly "empty". Like male characters, they represent ideology. What is at stake in such representation is a symbolic castration of the Chinese population. In depriving the characters of their private emotions, hankerings, and sexual desires, such literature was meant to desexualize and thus dehumanize the Chinese into "cogs" or "docile instruments" in the revolutionary machine. It is against such discursive ruin of love that the stories about love by contemporary women writers became uniquely important.

Love Undermining the Patriarchal-socialist Scheme

At the beginning of the new period, the dogmatic socialist principles were still the cardinal principles in China. Women writers' love stories published during this time often share a patriarchal socialist gender paradigm, a conceptual framework characterized by the superiority of the male lover, who is lovable because he stands firm in his belief in the socialist cause.

This scheme resulted from the interference of the superaddressee. According to Bakhtinian theory, texts enact the complex interactive structure of linguistic communication. Apart from the speaker and the addressee who both play a constitutive role in the formulation of any utterance, there is also an

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[2]. Meng Yue & Dai Jinhua, *Fuchu lishi dibiao* (Floating out of the horizon of history), p. 15.

"invisible present" third party, which Bakhtin names as the "superaddressee". "[A]ll utterances are spoken or written with the imagined response of this listener in mind."[3] Bakhtin identifies the potential superaddressee as "God, absolute truth, the court of dispassionate human sciences, the people, the court of history, and science".[4] In the socialist China where Mao and his revolutionary theory had supreme power, the orthodox ideology became the superaddressee, one that all writers had to address, consciously or unconsciously.

While the superaddressee is an "invisible present" third party, its power is more often visible. Actually, it is through its visible power that it becomes the invisible omnipresent third party. The victims of China's numerous political movements, including national campaigns to criticize a film, a novel, or an essay, with dire consequences to its author, testifies to this power. The superaddressee "speaks" largely in the form of the dominant language, which makes many literary works published at the beginning of the new period more transparently political than aesthetic.

The patriarchal element in the gender paradigm also comes from an even more omnipresent superaddressee, namely, the patriarchal ideology. As pointed out by critics, the CCP's revolution, as far as gender is concerned, was a power struggle of sons against the Confucian father.[5] Although women were called on to participate as allies, the revolution failed to change the patriarchal values. This is one basic reason why "[t]he rebellious youth of the May Fourth

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[3]. M. Keith Booker & Dubravka Juraga, *Bakhtin, Stalin, and Modern Russian Fiction: Carnival, Dialogism, and History* (London: Greenwood Press, 1995), p. 10.

[4]. Ibid.

[5]. See Meng Yue & Dai Jinhua, *Fu chu lishi dibiao* (Floating out of the horizon of history), pp. 6-26.

movement have become authoritarian fathers."[6] The deep-lying patriarchal ideology, internalized by almost the whole Chinese population in various forms, is a more powerful superaddressee. Thus in literary writing at the beginning of the new period, the superaddressee whom women writers dealt with was not only socialist but patriarchal as well, both of which inform the gender paradigm of patriarchal socialism. In spite of the combined ideological control, the women writers, as I shall demonstrate, let go of their female consciousness, which undermines the scheme.

To demonstrate female consciousness in such love stories, one needs a special reading strategy, which would treat the love discourse as double-voiced, "containing a 'dominant' and a 'muted' story". As Showalter writes:

> In the purest literary feminist literary criticism we are . . . presented with a radical alteration of our vision, a demand that we see meaning in what has previously been empty space. The orthodox recedes, and another plot, hitherto submerged in the anonymity of the background, stands out in bold relief like a thumbprint.[7]

In actuality, such a reading strategy may envision more than two plots in women writers' love stories: the orthodox plot, the humanist plot, and a feminist plot. In such a reading what is initially discovered as subversive may be challenged by a more deeply hidden plot. Such reading refracts the hidden female consciousness in the text as well as the open female consciousness in the reading. In the following I shall demonstrate how the gender paradigm of patriarchal socialism

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[6]. Lu Tonglin, *Misogyny, Cultural Nihilism, and Oppositional Politics: Contemporary Chinese Experimental Fiction*, p. 49.

[7]. Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" in Elizabeth Abel (ed.), *Writing and Sexual Difference* (London: The Harvester Press, 1982), p. 34.

is undermined in two of the most well-known love stories respectively written by Zhang Kangkang and Zhang Jie.

Zhang Kangkang's story "The Right to Love" (Ai de quanli, 1979)[8] shows an oppositional stance by asserting love as the basic human right against the inhumane political movements that persecute innocent people in the name of class struggle. It was acclaimed as "the first story to have struck on the morning bell of love" after the Cultural Revolution.[9] However, the patriarchal socialist gender paradigm regulated the representation of the male lover Li Xin as morally superior. He is a true Marxist who dares to fight against the dogmatic Marxism in China. He is therefore persecuted, then rehabilitated after the Cultural Revolution. By contrast, the female lover Shu Bei is timid, much scarred by her past experience as a daughter of "bourgeois artists." Not only does she fear to pursue love, she also distances herself from it, repressing her own feelings telling Li Xin that she is "not suitable" for him. Thus the relationship is structured hierarchically with Shu Bei situated in a secondary position.

Such gender hierarchy is even more striking in Zhang Jie's controversial story "Love Must Not Be Forgotten" (Ai shi buneng wangji de; 1979; abbreviated as "Love" hereafter in this discussion).[10] The story is told in the voice of Shanshan, daughter of Zhong Yu, a deceased woman writer who was in love with an old, married revolutionary cadre for more than twenty years until the last moment of her life. Shanshan recounts the story because she herself

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[8]. Zhang Kangkang, "Ai de quanli" (The right to love) in *Ai de quanli* (Guiyang: Guizhou Renmin Press, 1996), p. 199.

[9]. Zhang Ren, "Zhang Kangkang Pingzhuan" (A commentary biography of Zhang Kangkang) in *Zhongguo dangdai qingnian nüzuojia pingzhuan* (Commentary biographies of contemporary young Chinese women writers) (Beijing: Zhongguo Funü Press, 1991) p. 486.

[10]. Zhang Jie, "Love Must Not Be Forgotten" (Ai shi bu neng wangji de) in *Love Must Not Be Forgotten*, trans. Gladys Yang et al. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1986. All references to the story are from this source.

encounters a problem in love: she wonders whether she should break away from her physically attractive but intellectually inadequate boyfriend against the social pressure on herself as an "old spinster". Recalling her mother's love life, she finds an answer: one should not rush into a marriage but wait for the person whom one truly loves. Thus the text can be seen as containing two love stories: the mother's and the daughter's. It begins with the daughter's love story, which is interrupted by the mother's love story read and retold by the daughter who, implicitly, tries to resolve her own problem in love.

Piecing together her own memories and entries in her late mother's diary, Shanshan's recalls the extramarital love (a taboo up till the early 1980s) between her mother Zhong Yu and the old revolutionary cadre. The text tries, as much as possible in such a love tale, to avoid moral condemnation from conservative critics.[11] In doing so, the narrative takes pains to reduce its "immoral" factor to a minimum. First, Zhong Yu is made not so much "condemnable" as she was a divorced woman and hard-working writer, whose failure in marriage was attributed to her youthful inexperience in knowing herself and the then would-be husband. She is thus rightfully positioned to love and to be loved. If she was "wrong" in falling in love with a married man, she somehow redeems her "wrong doing" by exercising a highly moralized superego to keep her love within the boundary of her diary book. Moreover, her beloved old cadre is presented as "politically correct", because he was a staunch Marxist who had risked his life for the founding of the People's Republic. Furthermore, if the cadre loved Zhong Yu, he was nonetheless morally impeccable, because he married "out of the sense of responsibility and gratitude" the daughter of an old

[11]. The story's forbidden topic of extramarital love and the writer's sympathetic attitude towards it caused a half-year controversy in *Guangming Daily* from January till July 1980. Most of the critics were negative about the story as it "propagated bourgeois ideas and sentiments" and "sabotaged socialist morality".

worker who died to save his life during the war years, and he stuck to his revolutionary morality in maintaining the marriage so as not to harm the worker's daughter. Lastly, what makes their extramarital love able to withstand moral charges is their incredible lack of physical touch. In spite of their many years' love, the total time of the couple being together is "less than twenty-four hours" and they never went so far as to touch each other's hands.

Thus restricted, Zhong Yu's love refracts patriarchal socialist ideology. The revolutionary man is the center of love. Zhong Yu tells her daughter that "unless she worshipped a man, she couldn't love him for even one day." She worships and loves the old cadre because his

> strength of character won [her] heart. That strength came from his firm political convictions, his narrow escapes from death in the revolution, his active brain, his drive at work, and his well-cultivated mind.[12]

Elevated to be a hero, the male lover is shown as a virtual patriarchal father. In a brief chance meeting with Zhong Yu on the street, the old cadre comments on her newly published story about a love relationship similar to theirs: "You shouldn't have condemned the heroine. . . . There's nothing wrong with falling in love, as long as you don't spoil someone else's life . . . . In fact, the hero might have loved her too. Only for the sake of a third party's happiness, they had to renounce their love. . . ." While his comments hints at his love for Zhong Yu, his injunctive tone betrays the patriarchal feature of the Father, which is unmistakably reflected in Zhong Yu's facial expression: she "looked as upset as a first-year primary school child standing forlornly in front of a stern headmistress."

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[12]. Zhang Jie, *Love Must Not Be Forgotten*, p. 7.

Both Zhang Kangkang and Zhang Jie wrote their tales with a conscious purpose to justify the right to love and the position of love in life. Zhang Jie wrote the story as a literary note after reading Engels's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State.*[13] Her story affirms the supreme nobility of love itself. According to Zhang Kangkang, she wrote "The Right to Love" because she had experienced deep pain over deprivation of the right to love; also because in her life she had seen girls like the heroine and she wanted to show a little light to encourage them to strive for their right to love.[14] Yet, given the injunctive voice and the crude ideological underlining of the revolutionary lover, one wonders how the heroine could love him. A woman does not love a man just because he has a strong faith in Marxism. Nevertheless, Kam Louie categorized the two love stories as "love for love's sake", in which love is seen as a "fundamental human right, no longer a means to an end but an end in itself".[15] In this light, love is sufficient unto itself, and it is not important whom one loves as long as one loves. Thus the ideological idol lovers are not important. Whether they are patriarchal or socialist, they are only instrumental to love. The female protagonists do not really love them. They love the chance to love and their own ability to love. They love being in love itself. As the heroines betray their arranged love objects – the ideological idols of men, the gender paradigm of patriarchal socialism is undermined, if not dismantled.

The above reading is not entirely perverse, but reasonable if we take the generation of the women writers' own readings into consideration. In her

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[13]. Tian Shan and Wang He, "Jieshi le yansu de rensheng keti" (Revelation of a serious problem in life), *Guang ming ribao* (Guangming Daily), July 2, 1980.

[14]. Zhang Kangkang, "Xunzhao ziwo" (Looking for self) *in Xiaoshuo chuangzuo he yishu ganjue* (Fiction writing and the sense of art) (Tianjin: Baihua Wenyi Press, 1985), p. 13.

[15]. Kam Louie, *Between Fact and Fiction: Essays on Post-Mao Chinese Literature and Society* (Sydney: Wild Peony, 1989), p. 57.

university days Dai Houying, a woman writer famous for her novel *Humanity!* (Ren a, ren! 1981) became so engrossed in western novels that she would stand for hours on end reading a western novel beside a bookshelf in the library.[16] Zhang Jie, although a CCP member herself, found spiritual refuge only in the western novels of the 18th and 19th centuries, and even wished to submerge herself in these books, never having to resurface to cope with reality.[17] Zhang Kangkang simply confessed that of all the heroines she had come across in reading, Anna Karenina had impressed her most.[18] If western novels of humanist and romantic tradition have such great attraction to the women writers, then it must have taken hold in their consciousness. In this light, it is only natural that love itself becomes their heroines' highest love. Indeed, as the titles of the stories indicate, it is the matter of love, not the male lovers themselves, that counts. Against the background of a heroic literature of socialist revolution, the love stories were subversively refreshing. As love reigns supreme, the female consciousness functions like what Barthes would call an "obliteration of the warrior value".[19]

The Ironic Intervention of Love

The obliteration also works through an intervention tactic which, to borrow from Rey Chow,

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[16]. Dai Houying, *Xingge/mingyun--wo de gushi* (Personality/fate--my story) (Xi'an: Taibai Wenyi Press, 1994), p. 5.

[17]. Zhang Jie, "Wo de chuan" (My boat) in *Chinese Literature*, summer, 1985, p. 52.

[18]. Zhang Kangkang, *Xiaoshuo chuangzuo yu yishu ganjue* (Fiction writing and the sense of art), p. 110.

[19] . Roland Barthes, *Pleasure of the Text*, p. 30.

> cannot simply be thought of in terms of the creation of new "fields." Instead, it is necessary to think primarily in terms of borders – of borders, that is, as *para-sites* that never take over a field in its entirety but erode it slowly and *tactically*.[20]

Quoting Michel de Certeau, Chow argued for an intervention tactic, characterized with "the absence of a proper locus", betting "on time instead of space". It

> concerns an operational logic whose models may go as far back as the age-old ruses of fishes and insects that disguise or transform themselves in order to survive, and which has in any case been concealed by the form of rationality currently dominant in Western culture.[21]

Such an operational logic is relatable to the texts by contemporary Chinese women writers, especially relatable is the point of dissemblance for survival. For dissemblance conceals and protects erosion so that erosion could eventually work out a quality change. This dissemblance should be viewed as part of a historical intervention tactic, free from the writer's subjective intention, because it may be historically active but not subjectively identified as such by the eroding agents. Just like the majority of Chinese women writers, who do not identify themselves as "feminist" and are even opposed to being called "women writers", address women's problems nonetheless in a wide range of texts.

Moreover, whether there is a textual intervention is largely determined by reading, which would make the subjective intention irrelevant. On the part of the reader, textual intervention comes from looking into the text "for articulated

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[20]. Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 16.

[21]. Ibid.

hierarchies of value and meaning, above all to trace affiliations of inter- and extratextuality, to draw connections between the given text and others, between the text and the intellectual and material context".[22] Apart from this, in a text where mainstream ideology dominates, one need to read for gaps and contradictions that may erode or even collapse the governing ideological paradigm. One such intervention tactic is contextual irony, which erodes the "insidious heroism" and the myth of love even while it is being extolled, through an ironic literary context.

The contextual irony is not necessarily an intended irony and cannot be understood without reference to the context. "The term 'irony' originates in the Greek *eiron*, whom Aristotle defined as 'the mock-modest man' - the person who pretends to be or to know less than he actually is or does."[23] Current dictionaries explain irony as "saying the opposite of what one means". Both classical and current dictionary explanations imply that the speaker creates an irony and intends to gain the ironic effect. In contrast, contextual irony is different in that it may not be intended by the speaker/writer at all but results from reading into the context. This reading involves a reconstruction of meaning at a juncture where the reader finds incongruity between an outstanding situation/remark in the text and the context in general. In love stories of patriarchal socialism, quite often the contextual irony arises from the textual tension caused by an effort to follow romantic love, which gives emotions supreme priority, and the effort to abide by socialist ideology, which gives primacy to political dogma.

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[22]. Michael Groden and Martin Kreiswirth (eds.), *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory & Criticism* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), p. 278.

[23]. Nancy A. Walker, *Feminist Alternatives: Irony and Fantasy in the Contemporary Novels by Women* (Jackson and London: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), p. 27.

The contextual irony, therefore, exposes discrepancies, contradictions, and absurdities caused by language conflicts. For example, in Zhang Kangkang's "The Right to Love", Shu Bei does not want Li Xin to be a political warrior. At a meeting with Li Xin, she requests Li to give up his study of philosophy because, understandably, such a study means potential danger in China's changing political environment. But without a single word to alleviate Shu Bei's anxiety, Li Xin replies in a heroic oration:

> Human beings have to pay an enormous price on their route to freedom. In order to let the bright light of science shine, numerous materialists sacrificed their lives. You know Bruno, who stuck to science and truth, and was burned alive at the stake by the Inquisition. How can young people of our generation realize the Four Modernizations[24] if we do not have the spirit of self-sacrifice for science?[25]

The incongruence of Li Xin's pompous speech in the context of a love relationship produces an ironic effect, which satirizes his failure to play the passionate lover he is supposed to be.

The male authority in the patriarchal socialist gender paradigm is accustomed to the role of the Father/mentor, not that of a passionate lover. In making such a male figure the object of the heroine's emotional love, the incongruous, ironical situations such as the above are bound to come up, which again undermines the phallocentric love romance. For, if the socialist Father in the male figure prohibits him from being the ardent lover, then the heroine's passionate feelings and emotions towards him would look laughable and absurd. Here contextual irony again wrecks havoc in the patriarchal socialist

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[24]. The Four Modernizations are modernizations of industry, agriculture, science and technology, and national defense; the slogan was put forward by the CCP as a national goal after the Cultural Revolution.

[25]. Zhang Kangkang, "Ai de quanli" (The right to love) in *Ai de quanli*, p. 211.

gender paradigm. In such an irony the narrator is a relevantly detached observer. As Muecke put it, "the ironic observer is in a special relationship with what he observes; he is detached from what he observes and this ironic spectacle has . . . an aesthetic quality which, so to speak, objectifies it."[26]

An ironic observer, Zhong Yu's daughter Shanshan in Zhang Jie's "Love" presents to the reader the ironic spectacle of her mother being raptly in love with the revolutionary old cadre for years without reciprocation. Shanshan's view of the love romance reveals a third plot, in which female consciousness seeks independence out of a woman's cast role in the plot of phallocentric love romance.

As Shanshan recounts, Zhong Yu's love was sustained by masochistic emotionalism. In other words, she was painful and excessively emotional while being in love with the old cadre: "To catch a glimpse of his car or the back of his head through its rear window, she carefully figured out which roads he would take to work and back. Whenever he made a speech, she sat at the back of the hall watching his face rendered hazy by cigarette smoke and poor lighting. Her eyes would brim with tears, but she held them back". At midnight she would suddenly wake up to feel something was missing in her life. The excessive emotions make her life inadequate and miserable, only to be consoled by pouring out her heart to him in the form of a diary, which lasts for more than twenty years, after his death, up till her last moment "when the pen slipped from her fingers". Such masochistic emotionalism is detrimental to female development and, in this light, it does not belong to the scope of modern female consciousness, even though it is traditionally defined as feminine. In fact,

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[26]. Quoted from Nancy A. Walker, *Feminist Alternatives: Irony and Fantasy in the Contemporary Novel by Women*, p. 24.

modern female consciousness would unveil such "feminine" detriment as a legacy of phallocentric cultures.[27]

In Shanshan's narration, Zhong Yu's romantic attachment to the old cadre has more to do with a literary tradition than with the old cadre himself. Being a writer and reader who produces and consumes literary fantasy, Zhong Yu lived her life in romantic imagination and gained masochistic pleasure from it. Unable to be together with the old cadre and restrained from any physical touch, Zhong Yu read the cadre's gift of Chekov's volumes "every single day" for over twenty years. Shanshan was "puzzled by the way she never tired of reading him". As she recounts:

> Sometimes, when tired of writing, she poured herself a cup of strong tea and sat down in front of the bookcase, staring raptly at the set of books. If I went into her room then it flustered her, and she either spilt her tea or blushed like a girl discovered with her lover.[28]

Zhong Yu's fantasy is so much a part of her life that she must take a volume of Chekov's works with her whenever she goes away from Beijing. To imagine the old cadre meeting her at the railway station every time she comes back to Beijing from a trip she would not let her daughter meet her there. What she is in love with is her own fantasy informed by the literary tradition represented by Chekov.

Zhong Yu's fantasy informed by the pathos of humanist romantic love, albeit phallocentric, challenged an age of ascetic priesthood. Love, instead of the tedious theories of class struggle and revolution, was consecrated as the highest motto for a sexual relationship. Yet, ironically, in spite of the thematic title of the

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[27]. See Lydia H. Liu, "Invention and Intervention in Tani E Barlow (ed.), *Gender Politics in Modern China* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 48.

[28]. Zhang Jie, *Love Must Not Be Forgotten*, p. 5.

story - "Love must not be forgotten", Zhong Yu's unrequited fervent love, being fantastic and masochistic, is almost anti-thematic. As Shanshan comments: "if not a tragedy, it was too laughable." She has "no wish to follow suit." Thus objectified through ironic reading, Zhong Yu's love tragedy becomes a cautionary tale to her daughter and a broader female readership. In satirizing her mother's love story and the literary legacy behind it, Shanshan represents a female consciousness alienating itself from the phallocentric tradition of romantic love. This is the third female plot after the plot of the socialist father and the plot of romantic love.

Simultaneously, the female body also regains a measure of sexual autonomy. As Shanshan appeals to society: "Mind your own business and leave us alone! Let us wait patiently for our counterparts. Even waiting in vain is better than a loveless marriage. To live single is not such a fearful disaster." The appeal has a greater social significance than it appears. For at the beginning of the new period when the story came out in print, millions of female "educated youth", formerly sent to be rusticated in the countryside, had come back to the cities; aged around thirty, their male peers were mostly married and many female "youths" found themselves, like Shanshan, "shelved" in the marriage market. Shanshan's appeal called for those women to resist social pressure and maintain their sexual autonomy.[29]

The idea of sexual autonomy is opposed to the traditional sexual relationship, in which female sexuality is prescribed as servile and instrumental. In traditional China, "the whole purpose of a woman's life is to be sexually

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[29]. Kam Louie also points out this social background of the story and he takes the resistance as the initial purpose of Zhang's "Love". See Kam Louie, "Love Stories: the Meaning of Love" in *Between Fact and Fiction: Essays on Post-Mao Chinese Literature and Society*, pp. 58-59.

possessed by a man",[30] and her chief duty is to maintain the patriarchal order by producing sons. Lawfully, there were seven justifications (*qi chu*) for a man to divorce his wife (inability to produce a son is the strongest justification). Therefore, according to Lin Yutang, "an unmarried woman would feel the same as an unemployed worker."[31] And Lin observed, not unreasonably, that "in the eyes of the Chinese, the biggest evil of western society is the existence of too many single women."[32] In traditional Chinese society a woman was obliged to marry and supposed to stay with her husband, no matter he was wicked or an imbecile, dead or alive. This is what is described in the idiom "Following one man to the end of life (*cong yi er zhong*)". The marriage laws of the Ming and Qing Dynasties stated that "if a woman escapes from her husband, she should be caned with one hundred strokes".[33] Although the marriage law of the People's Republic of China asserts that women have equal rights to those of men's, the traditional discrimination against female sexual autonomy still lingers on. In the 1980s, there was still great social pressure on women who preferred not to marry and social disdain towards a woman who left her husband for another man.

With an understanding of the sociohistorical background as briefed in the above, one can see why Zhang Kangkang's largely didactic novella "The Northern Lights" (Beijiguang, 1981) became controversial in the early 1980s. Within the bigger plot of the mainstream language (China's Four Modernizations, in this case), there is a personal plot of the female self, in which

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[30]. Zhang Huaicheng, *Zhongguo de jiating yu lunli* (Family and ethics in China) (Beijing: Zhongguo Renmin Daxue Press, 1993), p. 179.

[31]. Lin Yutang, *Wuguo yu wumin* (My country and my people) (Beijing: Zhongguo Xiju Press, 3rd printing, 1991), p. 129.

[32]. Ibid., p. 138.

[33] . Zhang Huaicheng, *Zhongguo de jiating yu lunli* (Family and ethics in China), p. 76.

the heroine denounces the conventional family, ceases a registered marriage, and asserts her sexual autonomy. If sexual autonomy is the first condition of personal autonomy, then women's assertion of this autonomy threatens China's family-centered culture and society. At this level, the female consciousness as accentuated in the story acquires radical significance.

However, given Zhang Kangkang's didactic tendency in the story, how does the text come up with such a rebellion? It is through a female consciousness that compels an intervention tactic to push the didactic utopian rhetoric to its lyric extreme. In such a narrative maneuver the utopian rhetoric cannot but accommodate personal pursuit of freedom as an endorsement of its own lyrical spirit. According to Zhang Kangkang, she wrote the story with a sincere wish that "young people could, under the call of an ideal, see hope and strengthen their self-confidence, and thus walk towards brightness, no longer wandering in vacillation and uncertainty."[34] Her usage of words such as "ideal", "hope" and "self-confidence" is ambiguously accommodating, and therefore convenient for playing out two plots.

The "call of an ideal" comes out in a lyrical language, with the ideal symbolized by the spectacular northern lights. The heroine Qinqin regards the northern lights as "sacred" and "magic". The symbolism is accomplished with a string of imagery that constitutes a sublimated world with the northern lights at the center. Amid the imagery the individual's effort to ascend to the ideal is compared to the white snowflakes "struggling not to fall down", therefore, its purity and nobility is symbolically guaranteed and conveyed to the reader. With such lyrical foregrounding, Qinqin, urged and accompanied by her registered

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[34]. Zhang Kangkang, "Wo zengyang xie 'Beijiguang'" (How I wrote 'The Northern Lights' in her anthology *Xiaosho chuangzuo he yishu ganjue* (Fiction writing and the sense of art) (Tainjin: Baihua Wenyi Press, 1985), p. 25.

husband, reluctantly goes to take marriage photos on the eve of her wedding. Daniel Bryant gives a detailed analysis of how fantasy, mediation, and realist description juggle with each other in the narrative about this particular journey.[35] I would like to point out that it is within this juggling that the orthodox plot of the Four Modernizations recedes and the female plot of sexual autonomy emerges. The narrative abounds with compelling images that negate the conventional family: her bridal chamber is compared to a grave, her feeling on her way to take wedding photos is that of a person who is being sent to prison, and her situation is compared to that of a gold fish confined within a bowl. Despite the fact that Qinqin's later potential lover is a socialist hero, dedicated to China's Four Modernizations, the female plot affirms female sexual autonomy and thus consequently undermines the foundation of the patriarchal socialist pattern. This, however, exasperated conservative critics and provoked the criticism that the heroine's "gloomy view of marriage and the family" reflects a "pathological psyche."[36]

Female consciousness does not correspond well with the symbolic father – the language of patriarchal socialism. Once a woman writer looks into her lived experience as a woman, her expressions run the risk of becoming "pathological" in the male-centered public domain. Opposing to and interacting with this public domain, what we may refer to as the "personal domain" would expand in an increasingly open society. In my next chapter I shall discuss women writers' discourse on love in the personal domain, where women's bodily and

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[35]. Daniel Bryant, "Making it Happen: Aspects of Narrative method in Zhang Kangkang's 'Northern Lights'" in Michael S. Duke (ed.), *Modern Chinese Women Writers: Critical Appraisals*. New York and London: M. E. Sharpe, 1989.

[36]. See Zeng Zhengnan: "Ai de zhuiqiu weishenme xupiao – ye tan beijiguang" (Why is the pursuit of love empty - also talk about 'The Northern Lights' "), in *Gongkai de "neican"* (The public "Internal reference news") (ed. Zhongguo zuojiaxiehui wenyi chuangzuo yanjiuhui) (Changchun: Shidai Wenyi Press, 1986), p.125.

psychological details are no longer "pathological" but a necessary textual presence.

Chapter Three

Love in the Personal Domain

Existing side by side with the love tales largely restricted by the official discourse, are stories by women writers of more personal concerns. Against the background of the overwhelming official public discourse, I would like to discuss such love stories in terms of the personal domain, a discursive practice opposing the authoritative language that erases the individual person with abstract concepts such as the "People" or the "Party".[1] To be more specific about the personal domain, I would like to quote from Rosemarie Tong as an explanation:

> At the center of this domain is a set of "person-properties" (for example, the ability to reason, the capacity for self-awareness, the ability to deliberate and make choices) and their physical location, the body. Away

[1]. During the Cultural Revolution slogans such as "Fight against selfishness and criticize revisionism!" (*dou si pi xiu*) and "Fight relentlessly against selfishness whenever it flashes across one's mind!" (*hen dou si zi yi shan nian*) had prevailed to urge people to obtain a "selfless" (*wusi*) or "self-forgotten" (*wangwo*) transcendence. The Chinese critic Liu Zaifu attributed such phenomena to the comprehensive proletarian dictatorship, which aims to take possession not only of the economy of the nation but also "the souls of its citizens" (Liu Zaifu, *Fangzhu zhushen* (Banish the gods) (Hong Kong: Tiandi Tushu, 1994, p. 56). It is against such a "self-erasing" context that to re-establish a domain of the personal in the discourse of love became radical.

> from the center of this domain are the things and spaces the person uses as he or she engages in thought and action.[2]

The assertion of the personal domain redirects attention to personal and everyday experiences of alienation and oppression. In the Chinese context, its rise as a domain separate from the dominant political discourse accentuates the necessity and the importance of the concern for the individual person's happiness.

In the personal domain women writers' discourse on love shapes a personal modernity much needed by Chinese women. The expressions of this modernity include knowledge of the illusory nature of romance, the will to shatter the traditional bondage of the female body, and desire for pleasure. The three are interconnected. Without the realization that a woman should have as much agency as men in the realm of love, women can never attain emancipation. This way of reading, however, does not suggest a linear development in women's writing. Instead, it points to my own vision of a literary process refracting and reflecting on an increasingly open society of China, where women are beginning to have greater freedom, and more and more erstwhile unmentionable matters of the personal domain are drawn into discussion and representation.[3]

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[2]. Rosemary Tong, *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1989; 5th printing, 1995), p. 110.

[3]. For example, Li Xiaojiang, a leading female critic and pioneer of women's studies in China, discussed the hygiene problem of how to wash genital parts raised to her by village women when she was doing field research, and she asked provocatively in a tone disrespecting the social norm: "Who dare to care about one's bum in the years of revolutionary wars? When revolutionary martyrs were dedicating their precious lives to revolution, how could you still want your bum?" See Li Xiaojiang, *Guanyu nüren de da wen* (Answering questions about women) (Nanjing: Jiangsu Renmin Press, 1994), p. 207.

Self as the Object of Love

A demand of the good woman in the Confucian tradition was that she should not expose her body. So legend has it that a woman refused to let her doctor observe the sore on her breast and eventually died of the disease. The female body was un-presentable and un-representable. In the Qing Dynasty novel *The Dream of the Red Mansions*, a doctor is summoned to treat a lady who is seriously ill, but he can only feel the pulse of her wrist stretched out from behind a silky curtain, without seeing the lady's face. Only after he explains the lady's critical condition is he allowed to have a look at her face.[4] Although modern Chinese women are liberated from the confinement of being the un-presentable, "inside person" (*neiren*), the female body has generally remained un-representable.

Since the middle of the 1980s, however, the heroine in love stories by Chinese women writers began to look at her body in the mirror exhibitively. The mirror may be seen as having a special significance in contemporary Chinese women's stories of love as the heroine often begins her love journey from admiring her own body, fully or half-naked. Thus Chen Ran's heroine looks at herself in the mirror, comparing her own breasts to tender, juicy pears;[5] Lin Bai's heroine repeatedly appreciates her naked body in the mirror and is completely attracted to its curved beauty.[6] When a real mirror is absent, the heroine's eyes reflect her body. Thus Wang Anyi's heroine looks at her own body stretched

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[4] See Cao Xueqin (?–1763), *Hong lou meng* [The dream of the red mansions] (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Press, 1991), p. 578.

[5]. Chen Ran, "Ling yi zhi erduo de qiaoji sheng" (A knocking sound in the other ear) in *Qianxing yishi* (The potential anecdote) (Shijiazhuang: Hebei Jiaoyu Press, 1995), p. 21.

[6]. See "Zhiming de feixiang" (The fatal flying) in Ai Xiaoming (ed.), *Zhongguo nüxing xiaoshuo xinxuan* (A new anthology of stories by Chinese female writers) (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co., Ltd., 1997), p. 320.

under the moonlight and becomes so touched by it that she feels like sobbing.[7] Such mirror situations present a process of renarcissization or what Anne Herrmann would call "specularization", which she identifies as "the possibility of representing the female subject as self-reflexive act".[8] In this self-reflexive act the female consciousness asserts agency over the long-alienated female body. Hence we understand the joy or even sentimental expressions of the heroines.

Such a rediscovery is joyful or even sentimentally moving because it has overcome the centuries-long misogynist "antinarcissism" made, as Cixous says, "by men".[9] In this light, the heroine's gaze at her own body is a starting point for a feminist narrative. As Cixous calls on women: "Write! Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it."[10] Thus by emphasizing the body, the woman's narrative is not only strikingly rebellious but also significant in issues of philosophical and artistic concerns. As Li Jiefei points out:

> Abstractly or philosophically, the tendency to focus on one's body contains the meaning of "home returning"; actually it bears the same direction as the Socratic "knowing yourself" at the level of a common human nature. The purpose of feminist writing, in the final analysis, is to discover and reconfirm self. In order to do this, women writers . . . must withdraw step by step from the external world monopolized and ruled by the male language and back to a zero space where all male signs would be shelved

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7. Wang Anyi, "Huangshan zhi lian" (Love in the barren mountain) in *Huangshan zhi lian* (Wuhan: Changjiang Wenyi Press, 1988), p. 251.

8. Anne Herrmann, *The Dialogic and Difference: "An/Other Woman" in Virginia Woolf and Christa Wolf* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 26.

9. Helen Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" in Elaine Marks & Esabelle de Courtivron (eds.), *New French Feminisms* (New York: The Harvester press, 1981), p. 248.

10. Ibid., p, 246.

and dysfunctional. This space is the bare female body directly from nature.[11]

I would regard Li Jiefei's "zero space" as wishful thinking because there is no direct presence of things in the world of language since language mediates everything we express. Nonetheless, the embodied feminist narrative indeed points to a move towards a self to be freed from imposed meaning, be it socialist or patriarchal. In this connection, a positive evaluation should be given to those women's stories about sexuality and sexual relationship, in spite of their "aristocratic tendency" in focusing on love and "neglecting ordinary folk", as Li Ziyun criticized.[12]

In actuality the emergence of the mirror situation in women writers' fiction is also a response to China's social reality which "defeminizes" women. If defeminization can be seen as part of an instrumentalization program of the Chinese socialist regime, as it aims to turn human beings into "docile instrument of the Party" or "cogs" in the "revolutionary machine", then the Chinese heroine's mirror situation also shares something in common with Lacan's mirror stage. For in both there is "a particular case of the function of the imago, which is to establish a relation between the organism [female sexuality in the case of the Chinese heroines, however partial it may be] and its reality";[13] and in both there is "jubilant assumption of his [her] specular image". Moreover, if for Lacan, the mirror stage is "a drama" which "manufactures for the subject . . . the succession

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[11]. Li Jiefei, " 'Tamen' de xiaoshuo" (Their fiction) in *Dangdai zuojia pinglun* (Literary review), 1997:5, p, 80.

[12]. Li Ziyun, "Tamen zhengzai jueqi" (They are standing up) in Li Ziyun (ed.), *Zhongguo Nüxing Xiaoshuo Xuan* (Selected stories by Chinese female writers) (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co., Ltd., 1995), p. 7.

[13]. Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" in *Ecrits: A Selection*; trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1966), p.2.

of phantasies from a fragmented body-image to a form of totality . . . and lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity", then the Chinese heroines' mirror situation produces in stories of love a series of self-images, from the naked female body to a form of ego-centered entity, and lastly, to the recognition of the self in exile on the margin of society.

The process of seeing the self takes place in "an imaginary order, an order in which [the self] strives to see itself reflected in its relations to others".[14] In this order the reflection is imaginary and fluid. The process of seeing constantly recreates the self. Thus, in the Chinese heroine's mirror situation, when the male lover's gaze comes into the scene, the narcissistic heroine takes it as a mirror in which she sees what she imagines and, therefore, recreates herself. This is what happens in Wang Anyi's story "Love in the Beautiful Valley".[15]

The story is about a married woman editor of a literary magazine, who develops a ten-day romance with a writer at a literary conference. Before the romantic encounter, the heroine lives a dull life, and has a monotonous job. Her home has "nothing to stimulate her curiosity and interest", she and her husband are like "two one hundred year old houses on the opposite sides of a road, each having dismantled the other to bricks and tiles", with no more secret or mutual attraction left. As she goes on with the daily routine, she has an impotent rage over her powerlessness against the "mechanic system" that objectifies her: "like a planet on its orbit" she has to carry on, unable to stop or fall off. As a result, she becomes very irritable, often flaring up for nothing but her own objectified self amid the day to day repetition of a monotonous routine. Thus she has a need to recreate a "better" self.

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[14]. Ibid., p. xviii.

[15]. The story was first published in *Zhongshan* 1987:1, Nanjing. My references to this story are from Wang Anyi, "Jingxiugu zhi lian" (Love in the beautiful valley) in her anthology *Huangshan zhi lian* (Love in the barren mountain). Wuhan: Changjiang Wenyi Press, 1988.

The recreation of a "better" self is accomplished in a mirror situation of gaze. At the literary conference, she and a male writer fall in love with each other. Surrounded by a crowd that allows them little privacy, they convey their feelings through apparently casual touches and a mutual gaze – the male gaze and the reverse gaze from the heroine. However, with most of the textual space devoted to the heroine, the male gaze is just a catalyst to trigger off the female reverse gaze, in which she sees a new image of her self:

> Before him all her consciousness revived, and her rational sense became heightened. Consciously or unconsciously she selected and displayed the best part of herself . . . and repressed the parts which were not so good . . . she felt she had become better. She condensed the good part of herself into a more typical and real self, and thought it was her true self.[16]

The gaze-reverse-gaze play is carried out under an internalized, therefore, omnipresent social gaze. The latter, while restricting their physical contact in the environment of a collective meeting, enhances the imaginary function of the reverse gaze to the extent that the latter works just as well when the gaze of the other is temporarily absent:

> No matter how far she is away from him . . . she felt his gaze on her, so she willingly and happily tried her best to do things better: new meaning had emerged in her life as if she were reborn . . . Unconsciously she carefully protected her own image under his gaze. The image was so beautiful that she felt she was a stranger to it.[17]

The imaginary love reflected back on the self is by no means limited to the heroine; the male lover has an equal share, although he does not take nearly as much textual space as the heroine. When they each join other people in

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[16]. Ibid., p, 285.

conversation, whatever each says is for the other, regardless of the latter's presence or absence. If the other party is present, they each hurry to express herself/himself, but never listen to what the other is saying unless the other is talking about herself/himself.

> They were each concerned only with herself/himself, and each's attention went only to the self. They were each actually talking to her/his own self, and the other was just an imaginary listener. . . . In spite of all this, they felt themselves fuller and less isolated.[18]

The woman and man in love thus come into a "self-object relationship", in which "[t]here is little place [here or in any other dialogues] for love objects: love of the unique particularity of the other *qua* other."[19] In a repetitive, almost verbose, narrative style, the text amazingly plays out a drama of a female libido which leaves the love-object and sets the female subject's own ego in its place.[20] The "true object of desire", as Lydia, H. Liu comments on the story, "is the heroine herself".[21]

Liu thinks, however, that the heroine's love affair is "more fiction than reality".[22] Given that the whole story is fiction, the narcissistic love is not

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[17]. Ibid., p. 267.

[18]. Ibid., pp. 274-275.

[19]. Fred C. Alford, *The Self in Social Theory: A psychoanalytic Account of its Construction in Plato, Hobbes, Locke, Rawls and Rousseau* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 58.

[20]. Discussing the main characteristics of dementia praecox, Freud writes: "We thus slowly became familiar with the notion that the libido, which we find attached to objects and which is the expression of an effort to obtain satisfaction with those objects, can also leave the objects and set the subject's own ego in their place." See Sigmund Freud, "Libido Theory and Narcissism" in *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (The Penguin Freud Library Volume 1, Penguin Group, 1991), p 465.

[21]. Lydia H Liu, "Invention and Intervention" in Tani E Barlow (ed.), *Gender Politics in Modern China*, p. 50.

[22]. Ibid., p. 50.

particularly more fictional. On the contrary, it refracts a measure of truth about the self in love. Freud views this narcissism as entirely normal, natural and universal. As he tells us:

> if any such fixation of the libido to the subject's own body and personality instead of to an object does occur, it cannot be an exceptional or trivial event. On the contrary it is probable that this narcissism is the universal and original state of things, from which object-love is only later developed, without the narcissism necessarily disappearing on that account.[23]

The re-inscription of narcissism in the discourse of love problematizes a conventional understanding of love. Its greater significance, however, lies against the historical background of a misogynist "antinarcissism".

Freud points out that narcissistic instincts are universal, lasting throughout life in both women and men. But he emphasizes that women are particularly (more) narcissistic because of their Oedipus problems. Both Cixous and Anne Herrmann point out the contrary fact that women actually suffer from misogynist "antinarcissism" and therefore need to "renarcissisize" themselves.[24] In the Chinese context, the combination of the numerous Confucian injunctions about how to be a proper woman and the new socialist instructions about how to turn oneself into a "cog" in the revolutionary machine constitute an overwhelming misogynist "denarcissization"; against such a background, the reinsertion of the female ego into the center of the love scene is rebellious. Its

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[23]. Sigmund Freud, "Libido Theory and Narcissism" *in Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, p. 465.

[24]. See Anne Herrmann, *The Dialogic Difference: "An/Other Woman" in Virginia Woolf and Christa Wolf*, pp. 25-26, and Helen Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" in Elaine Marks & Esabelle de Courtivron (eds.), *New French Feminisms*, p. 248.

significance goes beyond that of a psychological drama and points to an emancipatory renarcissization on the part of women.

Rewriting the Hymen

In the process of renarcissization, the female self asserts agency over the female body. While such assertion is among the feminist discourses worldwide, it is all the more necessary for Chinese women because the Chinese social consciousness still stubbornly stuck to the myth of virginity or chastity. Up till the early 1990s the hymen remained highly fetishized in Chinese culture.[25] Articles with titles such as "How to correctly treat the matter of hymen?" or "The mysteries of the hymen" still had a welcoming readership.[26] The hymen was still regarded as a symbol of female sexual purity and a female trademark on the marriage market. In a 1990 survey on women's status, nearly 70 per cent of those under the survey agreed with the statement that "a woman's virginity is more

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[25]. The sociopolitical dimension of the hymen can be seen in the report that Lin Biao (Vice Chairman of China's Revolutionary Military Committee and Vice Chairman of the Central Committee of the CCP during the Cultural Revolution before his death in 1972), to maintain his prestige and authority, had to have a note in his handwriting circulated at a meeting of the CCP's Central Committee in 1966 to confirm that his wife Ye Qun, a ranking official in the central government at the time, was a virgin at their marriage. For the referred incident, see Ye Yonglie's reportage anthology, *Feiming* (Not a normal death) (Beijing: Guoji Wenhua Chuban Gongsi, 1996, p.123). Two more examples may show that the fetishism of the hymen is national and deeply rooted in women themselves. One is about a little girl raped and seriously injured by the rape when she was eight years old. After the rape everyone looked down upon her, even her own grandmother and mother considered her as "finished" and tried to stop her education because in her situation, they thought, the more ignorant she was, the better. See Dai Qing & Luoluo, "Younian ji zhao qiangbao" (Raped at a tender age) in Wang Fei (ed.), *Zhainü* (Fasting women). Shengyang: Chunfeng Wenyi Press, 1995. Another report is about a woman who broke her hymen in sports while she was at high school. When she later went to the countryside to "receive re-education" from the peasants as Mao called it, she was so scared by the village practice of testing bridal virginity with a piece of white cloth, she subsequently rejected all her suitors and remained single to prove her otherwise unprovable virginity. See Xiang Ya, "Nü shi ren tan" (Talks by ten women) in *Zhainü* (Fasting women). Ironically, the woman is also a Party official with career achievement. In spite of the general economic independence Chinese women have gained, sexual discrimination against women is far from being wiped out, and the national fetishism of the hymen is one of the strongest proofs of the patriarchal nature of Chinese society.

[26]. Harriet Evans, *Women and Sexuality in China* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), p. 106.

important than her life."[27] Significantly, Harriet Evans quoted from a Chinese women's journal a report on "hymen repair clinics" that have opened with resounding success in a number of towns "to give women a second spring".[28] Indeed, it is not a mere fantasy that in Chi Li's novella "Where the Clouds are Ruptured" [Yun po chu], the bridegroom Jing Xiang says on their wedding night to his bride: "If I find you are not a virgin, I'll kill you."[29] While the fetish of the hymen objectifies women into men's property, the hymen also symbolizes what men seek in women: realization of the male self through rupturing the female body to mark his mastery. Thus,

> [Chinese] men's obsession with virgins has remained unchanged since ancient time, and social opinions still attach great importance to women's virginity . . . For whatever reason, if a woman loses her virginity before marriage she will be disadvantaged in finding a spouse. Men take their possession of women's virginity as essential, and in courtship a woman would resign herself to the man to whom she has lost her virginity. . . Many men would cease a love relationship if they discover the beloved woman is not a virgin.[30]

The fetish of the hymen violates women's physical and spiritual integrity and adversely affects their pursuit of love. Hence, it is necessary and inevitable that the new heroines in love stories, especially by women writers with female consciousness, will de-fetishise the hymen.

There are a number of stories exposing the absurdity of the hymen fetish, some revealing the national internalization of the fetishism. One such story is

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[27]. Ibid.

[28]. Ibid.

[29] Chi Li, "Yun po chu" [Where the clouds are ruptured] in Dai Jinhua (ed.), *Shiji zhi men* [The door of the century] (Beijing: Shehui Kexue Wenxian Press, 1998), p. 265.

[30] Zhang Huaicheng, *Zhongguo de jiating yu lunli* [Family and ethics in China] (Beijing: Zhongguo Renmin Daxue Press, 1993), p. 185.

"The Red Dust",[31] which tells about a woman treated as a "bad element" during the Cultural Revolution just because she is driven to prostitution by poverty before the founding of the PRC, in spite of her recognized class identity as member of the exploited class. With gender sensitivity, the text points out that the concept of chastity is no less oppressive than the artificial class theory. The social stigma of losing virginity may kill a woman as refracted in Liu Sola's "Blue Sky Green Sea" (Lantian lühai),[32] in which the heroine's girlfriend dies of a self-induced abortion because she dare not expose her pre-marital pregnancy to the doctor. Zhang Jie also poignantly satirizes hymen fetishism in her novella "What Disease Does He Have?" (Ta you shenme bing?)[33] in which her female protagonist Ding Xiaoli's husband, a graduate with a degree in medicine, appeals to the court for divorce the day after their wedding night on the grounds that Ding is not a virgin. Ding has to undertake an examination, which reveals that her hymen is still intact. Ding later dreams that she has become a gigantic, extremely thin hymen membrane ready to be parceled out to women whose husbands are sexually ineffectual. However, notwithstanding the poignant sarcasm of patriarchal value, the female consciousness in the story exposes its limit. Why should Ding agree to have her hymen examined? To go through the examination is to abide by the patriarchal fetishism of the hymen. Moreover, when Ding later insists on divorcing her husband, the reason is that after the humiliation of letting her private parts be seen by others, she should divorce,

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[31]. Huo Da, "Hong chen" (The red dust) first published in *Hua Cheng*, 1986:3, Guangzhou: Hua Cheng Wenyi Press; the story is later included in *Huo Da wenji* (A collection of writings by Huo Da), Beijing: Beijing Shiyue Wenyi Press, 1999.

[32]. A translation of the story can be found in Liu Sola, *Blue Sky Green Sea and Other Stories*, trans. Martha Cheung. Hong Kong: Research Center for Translation, Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1993.

[33]. For a reprinting of the story, see Zhang Jie, *Lai dianr cong, lai dianr suan, lai dianr zhimayan* (A bit spring onion, a bit garlic, and a bit sesame salt). Wuhan: Changjiang Wenyi Press, 1994.

"otherwise it would be too unfair to her hymen." In saying so Zhang Jie unwittingly endorses the hymen as part of a woman's self value. Thus in spite of Zhang's poignantly satiric language, the story fails to challenge the female internalization of the hymen fetish.

Fang Fang's "Random Expressions" (Suiyi biaobai)[34] is more powerful in exposing women's internalization of the hymen fetishism. In the story the female consciousness is expressed with an awareness of the patriarchal inscription in women themselves. This awareness finds expressions in the life story of Yuyin, a beautiful TV program presenter, and in the ironic self-mocking tone of the female narrator, who is Yuying's friend. With an insight into educated women's existential situations, the female narrator, who is an editor of a journal, cynically comments upon herself as "shaped by books and conferences", with a "normal mind" and "healthy body", "able to do a lot of work and to contribute a great deal to society". The cynical tone comes from a repressed self: "I wrap up my emotions and all the hankerings of my individual personality." On her wedding night, her husband is "greatly pleased" to find that she is still a virgin, but the narrator says: "I don't know if I am pleased with my virginity." By saying so, the narrator refuses to admit the "value" of virginity and the refusal constitutes a rejection of the hymen fetish.

In contrast, her friend Yuyin lands in self-destruction because of her internalization of the hymen fetishism. Yuyin falls in love with Xiao, a peasant's son who comes to the city and becomes a journalist by way of marrying the mentally retarded daughter of a powerful woman editor of the provincial daily. Xiao passes himself as unmarried and flirts with Yuyin until he discovers that she is still a virgin. Compunction tortures Xiao because he has destroyed Yuyin's

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[34]. References to this story are from Fang Fang, *Suiyi biaobai* (Random expressions). Wuhan: Hubei Cishu Press, 1993.

virginity. A marriage, however, is impossible. For Xiao to marry Yuyin means, first of all, to divorce his mentally retarded wife, which would enrage his mother-in-law. Consequently, he would lose his job and be forced to go back to his backward village, which to him is no better than death itself. Yuyin at first puts love above all and insists on Xiao's divorce but later understands she herself cannot live like a peasant woman. By the time her romance with Xiao comes to an end, rumors about her "looseness" has spread around in her work unit. Considering her body already possessed by Xiao, Yuyin cannot restart life but tries to "live up to the scandal", although resentfully, by abandoning herself to promiscuity with a number of men who come to her and in whom she has a fleeting interest. As a result, she contracts venereal disease.

From objectifying herself as a belonging of her lover to her self-abandonment when love fails, Yuyin's existence is limited within the enclosure of patriarchal ideology. At the center of this enclosure is virginity: when she loses her virginity to her lover, she loses her entire being to him; when she is dispossessed by him, she surrenders herself to other men who regard her as a "lost" sexual object. In acknowledging patriarchal prescription and inscription in sexual relations, the text simultaneously claims power as the ironic tone seeps through. However, sarcastic as the text is, the fetishism of the hymen lingers on. For, compared with Yuyin, the narrator lives a normal and healthy life just because she retains her virginity and therefore has a smooth marriage.

A more radical female consciousness would enable the heroine to re-evaluate her own hymen. Such a heroine is Xingzi in Fang Fang's novella "One Glittering Moment".[35] Xingzi is in love with Xi, a young man of intelligent humor who feels himself inferior to Xingzi because his father is a "counter-

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[35]. References to this story are from Fang Fang, "One Glittering Moment" (Taohua canlan) in *Three Novellas by Fang Fang*. Beijing: Panda Books, 1996.

revolutionary" Rightist. His sense of inferiority worsens as Xingzi is somewhat complacent about her father who, as a "counter-revolutionary academic authority", is a notch higher in political status than Xi's father. Xi's sense of inferiority prevents him from baring his heart to Xingzi. On the other hand, there are also for Xi "two kinds of irresistible temptation: beautiful women and desire for power". Frustrated in his relations with Xingzi and tempted by the sexy Shuixiang as well as the possibility to become a cadre through connection to Shuixiang's relative, Xi develops a sexual affair with Shuixiang, but regrets to find Xingzi greatly hurt by it, especially by the details of their sexual affair which Shuixiang complacently describes to Xingzi. Every word of the details "made Xingzi's flesh crawl" and the details, though not given in the text, acquire considerable significance in the title of the novella: one glittering moment. Symbolically, the glittering moment alludes to the moment of hymen rupture, to which Xingzi attaches untold importance in guarding her own virginity.

A great irony comes, however, when she loses her virginity to Yiwen, whom she has been acquainted with for only two weeks. Yiwen seduces Xingzi at the moment when Xingzi sadly realizes she has to break off with Xi forever. While Xingzi surrenders herself to Yiwen's desire, she herself is aroused as well. Afterwards Xingzi reflects on herself and her love affair. She "became aware that she had been guarding something she considered precious so many years for nothing. Because when she finally gave it away she found it was worthless."

Having made virginity "worthless", Xingzi further transgresses the boundary of chastity and dissolves its patriarchal meaning. After she marries Yiwen she still misses Xi. When she hears that Xi has been diagnosed with cancer, she goes to spend a night with him. After Xi dies she gives birth to a baby who resembles Xi very much. Although Xingzi realizes "it is him", she shows no

particular joy as Ling'er (in Zhang Jie's "Emerald")[36] does in a similar situation, or shame or any feeling of betrayal to her husband, as heroines inscribed by patriarchal ideology tend to. Instead, "her thoughts drifted toward a far away place blanketed with peach blossoms," and she "asked herself, what is it? What does it mean?" Since no answers are meant to be provided, the questions signify a recuperation of the hymen from the patriarchal values, and hence the recuperation of the female body, as Barthes would say, "by a null meaning".[37]

Expressing Female Desire

Renarcissized and liberated from the fetishism of the hymen, the financially independent heroine demands a quality love in which she can be physically and spiritually contented. Typically, with "her classical mode of losing herself in deep thought" and "a modern woman's desire for sensual experience of direct and pure bodily action", Chen Ran's heroine "stretches out her two legs towards the sacred and the sensual at the same time."[38] If the mind and the body, the spiritual and the sensual, are traditionally valued with the former in the pairs described as "sacred", then the very expression of such combined desire in a female character claims a non-hierarchical integration of mind and body in the subject position. Such a heroine sets up a brand new type of woman in Chinese literature.

But in trying to express female desire, the Chinese woman writer encounters a dearth of words. The desire-prohibitive Confucian doctrine does not recognize female desire, which consequently finds little expression in the

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[36]. For the English translation of the story, see Zhang Jie, *Love Must Not Be Forgotten*, trans. Gladys Yang et al. Beijing: Panda Books, 1986.

[37]. Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Papermac, 1995), p. 98.

[38]. Chen Ran, "Ling yi zhi erduo de qiaoji sheng" (A knocking sound in the other ear) in Chen Ran, *Qianxing yishi* (The potential anecdote), p. 50.

Chinese language. Although China has the richest pornographic literature in the world, the pornographic expressions, predominantly phallocentric, are not what the new heroine wants. Facing the paucity of appropriate expression and caught between the idioms of the virtuous wife and the lustful woman, two polarized archetypes of womanhood, the new heroine finds her language in the act of rewriting the term "whore".

In Chen Ran's works, "whore" acquires a disruptive meaning as it implicitly redefines the sexual role of the wife who finds no spiritual compatibility in marriage, and consequently questions the role of the husband. Often the married heroine associates her married identity to that of a whore. In "The Potential Anecdote" (Qianxing yishi),[39] the heroine Yuzi imagines herself to be a whore while abandoning herself to sexual intercourse with her husband. In Chen's other stories such as "The Silent Left Breast" (Chenmo de zuoru)[40] and "A Knocking Sound in the Other Ear" (Ling yi zhi erduo de qiaoji sheng), Chen let her heroines, who, like the writer herself, are engaged in occupations of writing with an interest in philosophy, live a single life which does not exclude the pleasure of sex with men. For them sex does not necessarily have to do with love, but a need to be met. They simply ignore the moral taboos for women in this respect and go to bed with a male friend whenever they have the whim to do so. In such actions they turn the man into a mere sexual object. In "The Hungry Bag" (Ji'e de koudai) the divorced heroine and her female friend share her ex-husband, who comes to request her to live with him again. While in bed with the man in the middle between them, they, "like two generous and

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[39]. All references to this story are from Chen Ran, "Qianxing yishi" (The potential anecdote) in Chen Ran, *Qianxing yishi*.

[40]. All references to this story are from Chen Ran, "Chenmo de zuoru " (The silent left breast) in Chen Ran, *Weixian de quchu* (A dangerous place to go). Beijing: Guangming Daily Press, 1996.

chivalrous women", try to let the other have him first "as if he were a nice dish".[41] Chen's bold expressions of female desire is rebellious and devastating to patriarchal values.

Nevertheless, Chen's texts convey a profound frustration with the lack of emotional and spiritual compatibility in erotic relationships, which causes the separation of mind and body in the heroine regarding love. For Chen's heroines, "the fulfillment of bodily desire cannot replace spiritual demand, and if there is no spirit, sex would be passionless, just like doing physical labor."[42] Unlike men who are contented with bodily intimacy, Chen's heroines search for a soul-mate by way of fantasy. They entertain dreams of a new type of man which, however, is immediately suspected as utopian. In "The Silent Left Breast" (Chenmo de zuoru) the first-person narrator takes fancy to her handsome hairdresser and gets him to have an affair with her. But, the narrator forbids the hairdresser to touch her left breast, which she reserves according to a legend for a yet-to-appear man whom she will really love, but then she says: "I have to imagine that man to maintain my life with lies."[43] In "The Empty Window" (Kong de chuang) the female narrator simply imagines that her lover will be a spiritually and physically ideal man.[44] The discrepancy between the heroines and the inferior male lovers challenges the traditional gender hierarchy. However, if an ideal

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[41]. Chen Ran, "Ji'e de koudai" (The hungry bag) in *Weixian de Quchu* (A dangerous place to go), p. 219.

[42]. Chen Ran, "Wuchu gaobie" (Nowhere to say farewell) in *Jingji de guitu* (The forbidden return journey) (Beijing: Guangming Daily Press, 1996), p. 275.

[43]. Chen Ran, "Chenmo de zuoru " (The silent left breast) in *Weixian de quchu* (A dangerous place to go), p. 354.

[44]. Chen Ran, "Kong de chuang" (The empty window) in Chen Ran, *Qianxing yishi* (The potential anecdote), p. 305.

lover is to be imagined so as to keep life meaningful then the heroine's life is still phallocentrically configured.[45]

What may be called "lesbian consciousness" is expressed in Chen's stories as ultimately leading to a resolution of the problem of female separation of mind/body in sexual intimacy. This "lesbian consciousness" is, first of all

> a point of view, a view from the boundary. And in a sense every time a woman draws a circle around her psyche, saying 'this is a room of my own,' and then writes from within that 'room,' she is inhabiting lesbian consciousness.[46]

This is a broad lesbian consciousness, whose lesbianness can be best perceived at a deep cultural level marked by female cognition of women's marginality. The sense of marginality provides a foundation for the broad lesbian consciousness to identify a "household of the soul"[47] in another female, which may resolve the problem of female separation of mind/body in sexual intimacy.

A number of Chen's essays and stories impart this lesbian consciousness with images reiterating female marginality: a female travelling in the wilderness to look for her own home place,[48] a "truly solitary" female who "silently observes

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[45]. One may say that Chen's heroines refract the writer herself, as she says "All my life I have been pursuing this noble and fatal love above flesh (not excluding flesh), which, in some respect, is my creative motivation, the imperial lord of my life, and part of the reason for me to live on." See Chen Ran, "Chao xingbie yishi yu wode chuangzuo" (Gender-transcending consciousness and my writing) in *Duan pian can jian* (Fragments of writing). Kunming: Yunnan Renmin Press, 1995.

[46]. Quoted from Bonnie Zimmerman, "What Has Never Been" in Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (eds.), *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1996), p. 129.

[47]. I borrowed the term from Vincent P. Pecora, *Households of the Soul*. Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

[48]. Chen Ran, "Zhipian jiuzhang" (Nine chapters on pieces of paper) in *Nüren Meiyou An* (Women have no shore) (Nanjing: Jiangsu Wenyi Press), p. 157.

and writes in a corner away from sunshine and the bustling stage",[49] and the "one-person space" in which a free woman builds up her own fence after "breaking through the fence of public opinions".[50] The marginality of a lesbian-orientated existence on the periphery of patriarchal culture situates Chen to look at society from the boundary of the phallocentric culture. Thus it is not surprising that the image of a lonely, reflective (financially independent) woman frequently appears in Chen's stories.

According to Chen, "maturity means the ability to be alone."[51] In fact all her female characters are lonely, who feel out of tune with their husbands or lovers and are alienated in their social milieu. As lonely unconventional souls, they are homeless in spiritual terms, because culturally, in a male-defined society, they have nowhere to belong. To convey this status, a Chinese metaphor which can be literally translated as "snapped stem and drifting bitter fleabane" (*duangen piaopeng*) frequently appears in her texts, implying wandering and the desire for a spiritual household to which the homeless female soul could belong. The feeling of homelessness, of not belonging, is emphasized. Chen has an essay and a story respectively entitled "Women Have No Shore" and "Nowhere to Say Farewell", which are also used as titles for two of her anthologies. Such a feeling of homelessness is a result of self-exile from mainstream ideology.

Different from other philosophical quests for an ultimate household of the soul, Chen's search for a female spiritual household indicates the awakening of a female consciousness, which develops roughly along such a route: alienated from the father/men - tentative in developing a female relationship - finding a

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[49]. Ibid., p. 160.

[50]. Chen Ran, "Ziyou shi yige meiyou qiang de lüshe wuding" (Freedom is a green roof that has no wall) in *Nüren meiyou an* (Women have no shore), p. 151.

[51]. Chen Ran, " Gudu de nengli" (The ability to be alone) in *Nüren meiyou an* (Women have no shore), p. 170.

spiritual home in a female soul-mate. The alienation from the father sows the seed for intimacy with women. As the first-person narrator says in "Cheers to Bygone Things" (Yu wangshi ganbei):

> I think my mother is the most tender-hearted, most beautiful and most knowledgeable woman as well as the most unfortunate woman under the heaven. I feared my father during my entire childhood. For a long time I lived in the terror and shadow of my father who represented men, which made me fearful of all men who represented the father's authority. My men-fearing psyche was pathological and made me project my natural tendency for intimacy towards women.[52]

The aspiration for female intimacy is vividly represented in "A Knocking Sound in the Other Ear" (Lin yi zhi erduo de qiaojisheng). The heroine Dai'er, while treating a male poet as a sexual object, is attracted to her mysterious female neighbor Yi Duoren whom Dai'er sees as a "splendid" beauty. For Yi Duoren, Dai'er is her "desire that has lost the ability to act for many years", and for Dai'er to "grasp her [Yi Duoren] tightly is to be close to herself". If a daughter's independence from parental control often involves entrance into a heterosexual relationship, as it does in Chinese society, then for Dai'er, independence begins with seeking a female soul-mate. As her monologue goes:

> It has been years since I started to look for Yi Duoren. She is the very woman who rescued me from the love test my mother gave to me with her [the mother's] face covered by a piece of black cloth![53] Only this woman can, with her maternal arms, drag me out of my mother's

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[52]. Chen Ran, "Yu wangshi ganbei" (Cheers to bygone things) in *Jingji de guitu* (The forbidden return journey), p. 205.

[53]. The mother/daughter relationship is often described in Chen's writings. The love test mentioned here seems to be in one of Chen's actual dreams, which she recalls in a letter to her friend. See Chen Ran "Yige ren zoulu" (Walk by oneself) in *Nüren Meiyou An* (Women have no shore), pp. 49-50.

stubborn carving of me before I am carved into a stone statue. How I need this woman![54]

The identification of the other woman as a destined life companion speaks clearly of "a shared secret between the two", the secret of lesbian preference, which exists in Dai'er but at the same time terrifies her. As the title of the anthology *A dangerous place to Go* (Weixian de quchu) indicates, homosexuality is dangerous in China. Although the imaginary Yi Duoren represents "a kind of unrealistic individual and a taboo relationship,"[55] the very creation of this character shows that the writing consciousness has overcome a self-deprecatory doubt of female homosexuality.

Chen's story "Break Open" (Po kai) further points to female intimacy bordering on lesbian love as a new starting point on a feminist journey. In the story a women's association is to be established and "Break Open" is the name suggested for it by the narrator Dai'er and her best female friend Yunnan. The "Break Open Women's Association" resolves to break through conventional opinions but will not "show itself off with any feminist sign-board", because "it aims at real sexual equality with gender-transcending consciousness, and endeavors to break through the norms and principles established by men to unify the world."[56]

The word "gender-transcending consciousness" is a term Chen used as the title of a paper she delivered at a meeting in England in 1994. In this paper her idea of gender transcendence is mainly centered on love - "genuine love transcends gendered sex just as pure literature transcends politics to achieve

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[54]. Chen Ran, "Lin yi zhi erduo de qiaojisheng" (A knocking sound in the other ear) in *Weixian de quchu* (A dangerous place to go), p. 313.

[55]. Ibid., p. 314.

[56]. Chen Ran, "Po kai" (Break open) in *Weixian de quchu* (A dangerous place to go), p. 419.

independence."[57] As she explains, "love/emotional love and making love/having sex are two different things. Emotional love exceeds carnal love, as the former includes heart and soul, thought, and the physical body. This is the most thrilling of all human sentiments and is what could really excite a modern woman in her entire body and spirit."[58] She located this idealized love in homosexual love, which she considered still inadequate due to some unspeakable sociopolitical limits in China. As she points out: "There are quite a number of people involved in spiritual homosexual love in China, especially among the outstanding - namely, writers, artists, and thinkers. . . . Admittedly, love without physical intimacy is twisted, incomplete, even hopeless."[59]

If Chen's essay is inadequate in clarifying the concept of gender-transcending consciousness and if the gender-transcending same-sex love is inadequate in reality, Chen as a novelist attempts to compensate for the inadequacies through literary imagination. In "Break Open" she gives a clearer explanation through Dai'er's voice for the concept of gender-transcending consciousness":

> I think the idea that a woman must expect a man and can only expect one man in her life is an imposed norm, accepted through common practice over thousands of years. In order to survive, a woman has to choose a man so as to join the "majority" to become "normal" - this is a choice out of no choice and I do not consider it right. I would rather put one's gender identity behind the quality of his/her person. I do not mind his/her gender identity, nor do I care that I am in the "minority", and I do not think this is "abnormal". I feel that the endearing ability exists not only

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[57]. Chen Ran, "Chao xingbie yishi yu wo de chuangzuo" (Gender-transcending consciousness and my creative writing) in *Nüren Meiyou An* (Women have no shore), p. 118.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid., p. 119.

between men and women but, in fact, is also a long wasted potentiality between women.[60]

This is the first time a woman writer justifies lesbianism in clear words in Chinese women's literature. It calls for love free from the conventional sexual relationship based on reproductive culture so as to enable individuals to choose their love "according to their own psychological tendencies and structures."[61]

A sisterhood bordering on lesbianism is eventually shown as a way to solve the mind/body separation problem in the heroine of love. In this story Dai'er and her female friend Yunnan unabashedly show their admiration and appreciation of each other in both mind and body, and they agree that when they are together "that problem", which implies the separation of mind and the body in heterosexual love, is no longer existent. On board an airplane, Yunnan asks Dai'er: "What would you do if we were to die in a minute?" Dai'er says: "I would tell you that I am very fond of you but I have got no chance to tell you." Unsatisfied with Dai'er's answer, Yunnan says haltingly: " . . . I would kiss you . . . We have been together for so long, Why can't we? . . . Why can only men kiss women or kiss you?"

The haltingness caused by the "sensitivity and difficulty" of the topic disappears in Dai'er's dream. As she dreams, the plane is going to crash, and Yunnan solemnly tells Dai'er: "You are the most outstanding person I have ever seen and the most satisfactory to my heart. You have outshone all men surrounding me." If Chen asserts here the excellence of the female self, it also openly affirms the non-utilitarian, emotional-spiritual lesbian relationship which

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[60]. Chen Ran, "Po kai" (Break open) in *Weixian de quchu* (A dangerous place to go), p. 419.

[61] Chen Ran, "Chao xingbie yishi yu wo de chuangzuo" (Gender-transcending consciousness and my creative writing) in Chen Ran, *Duan pian can jian* (Fragments of writing), p. 126. Quite a few Chinese women writers, such as Lin Bai and Xu Kun, also write about female bond, but none has such a strongly evident lesbian bearing.

does not exclude bodily desire.[62] The affirmation of the female self also comes with a consciousness of need for a broader female bond, as Dai'er in her dream wishes to say to Yunnan: "If I cannot live together with you [one understands here that if the social condition does not allow them to live together] I want you to be my closest neighbor, because I cannot endure the lonely life any longer. We shall get all the talented women together to form a community of sisters." The reason, as the old woman in Dai'er's dream advises, is "because only women best understand women and sympathize with women."[63]

The sisterhood bordering on lesbianism provides not only the solution of the female separation of the body/mind in sexual intimacy, but also a philosophical sense of home for the female self, who always "lives outside the splashing tide and walks on the marginal little path,"[64] and who is "always entrapped in the word 'leave' . . . on a never-ending journey looking for a non-existent home place."[65] In "Break Open" the lonely Dai'er and Yunnan eventually find a spiritual and emotional home in each other, as Dai'er finally says to Yunnan in a loud voice: "I want you to go back with me! I need the feeling of home, and someone at home to face the world together with me." Thus the "sacred" and "sensual", which the heroine of love sets out to pursue, shall meet at the home of two women desiring each other.

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[62]. I refer the relationship as "lesbian" also according to Faderman's definition: " 'Lesbian' describes a relationship in which two women's strongest emotions and affections are directed towards each other. Sexual contact may be a part of the relationship to a greater or lesser degree, or it may be entirely absent. By reference the two women spend most of their time together and share most aspects of their lives with each other." See Bonnie Zimmerman, "What Has Never Been" in Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (eds.), *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*", p. 122.

[63] Chen Ran, "Pokai" [Break open] in Chen Ran, *Weixian de quchu* (A dangerous place to go), p. 437.

[64]. Ibid., p. 421.

[65]. Chen Ran, "Lin yi zhi erduo de qiaojisheng" (A knocking sound in the other ear) in *Weixian de quchu* (A dangerous place to go), p. 333.

Conclusion: Play out of the Quest

Forty years after the founding of the PRC and some thirty years after the majority of them became financially independent, Chinese women are engaged in all fields of life. Nevertheless, "love has remained mostly", as Wendy Larson pointed out in writing about women and literature in the 1920s and 1930s' China, "a female arena."[66] But what makes the arena very different from before is the rapid change of ideas relating to women and love. From love of an ideologically correct hero within the patriarchal socialist gender paradigm to lesbian love within the personal domain, the search for love seems to have made a spiral journey and come back to the love heroines themselves.

The texts of love have testified to an emerging female consciousness alienating itself from two utopian discourses: the grand socialist narrative and the phallocentric love romance. In this process, the female consciousness relies more and more on lived experience. As Chi Li, a woman writer with a medical science background, put it: "The unmasked life, death, and pain drew my attention to the true process of life so that I no longer look at life through others' spectacles."[67]

The women writers' attention to "the true process of life" helps to produce a personal vision, which is based more on lived experience than on phallocentric textual fantasies. With her medical training in the background, Chi Li's story "Do Not Talk about Love" (Bu tan aiqing)[68] takes a "pragmatic tinkering approach" towards love. The male protagonist Zhuang Jianfei, a promising young surgeon, begins masturbating and fantasizes about girls from

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[66]. Wendy Larson, *Women and Writing in Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 105.

[67]. Chi Li, *Zhengshi de rizi* (The real life) (Nanjing: Jiangsu Wenyi Press, 1995), p. 221.

[68]. References to "Bu tan aiqing" (Do not talk about love) are from Chen Xiaoming (ed.), *Nüxing xiaoshuo jingxuan* (Selected stories by female writers) Lanzhou: Gansu Renmin Press, 1994.

his teens when he is regarded as a well-behaved, excellent student of an elite intellectual family. At the age of 28, he is obviously in need of a wife to meet his sexual needs. In spite of his professor parents' objection, he marries Ji Ling, an attractive young woman from a lower class family, instead of a woman doctor who is fond of talking about philosophy. Hamstrung by her disadvantaged family background, Ji marries Zhuang as a means to achieve respectable social status. Ji works as a shop-assistant and does all the house work, but she manages to maintain her personal dignity when Zhuang neglects it. Zhuang eventually learns to respect and care for his wife. The sexual relation is, to some extent, transactional, but given that the nature of love as love for self-object and the socioeconomic context of China, mutual benefit in sexual relations is by no means immoral. On the contrary it is the base for conjugal love. As Ji and Zhuang reconcile with each other after their conflicts, a non-hierarchical and mutually caring sexual companionship displaces the love ideal. In this light Chi Li represents a female consciousness in a pragmatic self-discovery after a decade long romantic journey.

If, since after the Cultural Revolution, romantic love has changed from an ideologically heightened status to, at best, a dubious uncertainty, one should not feel surprised over its decline. As the mainstream ideology has taken a pragmatic turn with the rapid changes of economic reforms, money has become, perhaps, the only transcendental signifier. Against this socioeconomic background, the woman writer Jiang Zidan's story "Last Sound" (Juexiang) is significant for a conclusion of the chapter.[69] The story depicts a female poet, who commits suicide for the sake of love, but no one believes anyone nowadays could be so stupid as to die for love, not even a poet, except the female narrator/writer

[69]. Jiang Zidan, *Jiang Zidan xiaoshuo jingcui* (Selected stories by Jiang Zidan) Chengdu: Sichuan Renmin Press, 1998.

herself. Instead, many believe that the female poet kills herself in a fit of anger because she has been given a fish smaller than those given to other cadres in a fish distribution. Love and emotions seem to have become incredible nonsense in the marketplace of China, where erstwhile sacred creeds are crumbling. The effort by women writers to find in love a lyrical poem seems to have come to a dead end.

There is an implication, however, that the love story may continue since the female writer/narrator still believes in the writing of the romantic female poet, even if she cannot convince others of its sincerity. Thus, from the first call to love to the parodic rewriting that plays out of the love discourse, the quest for love as refracted in contemporary Chinese women writers' stories, to borrow from Gayatri Spivak, "displays that the truth of a human [women's] situation *is* the itinerary of not being able to find it."[70]

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[70]. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), p. 75.

Part Two

Female Consciousness: the Dilemmas

What are the attributes of "a proper Chinese woman"? In her interviews with Chinese women to find an answer to the question, Margery Wolf found a Chinese woman would immediately take the subject to mean a "proper wife or mother or daughter-in-law, and if you object, she [would tell] you about a good daughter".[1] Wolf also interviewed a tenth as many men as women about the "attributes of a proper Chinese man", and they responded with "descriptions of their occupations, politics, personalities, or physical prowess".[2] Given the fact that the interviewed Chinese women were not professional housewives but fulltime workers, the contrast between the responses from women and men reveals a legacy of Confucian dictum: "Men do things outside and women do things inside (*nan zhu wai, nü zhu nei*)." In spite of their fulltime income-earning ability, the interviewed women still regarded themselves as supportive, secondary, and they regarded their traditional gendered roles as the most important roles they should perform.

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[1]. Margery Wolf, *Revolution Postponed: Women in Contemporary China*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), p. 112.

[2]. Ibid.

The responses from the Chinese women interviewed by Wolf, however, did not evade Wolf's question. Woman is a gendered sexual identity that necessarily bears some other identities. While the interviewees may have different professional or occupational identities, they must be wives, daughter-in-laws, or daughters in a society, where marriage is the only legitimate means to meet sexual and emotional needs. It is their family-related identities that mark them as women. Nevertheless, the idea of the family related identity as the only identity of a woman reflects the reality of women's dilemmas, of which women themselves may not be quite conscious.

Chinese women writers are more sensitive about the dilemmas. In her "About Women", Fang Fang divides women into two categories. One category of women are those who are straightforward and precise in speech, able and efficient in work. They are seen as "man-like" women or "strong women" in Chinese society, regardless of their domestic performance. The other category includes those who are timid, soft-voiced, always beating around the bush in expressing opinions, fond of saying that cooking and attending on their husbands are what they like most. The second category are regarded as "real Oriental women" in Chinese society. People talk about the former category of women with derogatory undertone and the latter in commendatory terms.[3] Such "people's talk" constitutes a male-defined social opinion that affects women's psyche and behavior.

This part is not going to further display the quality of a "proper woman". Wolf's investigation and Fang Fang's observation are cited in the above only to complement a context of the texts to be discussed later. After forty years socialist revolution, China is still largely traditional under its socialist surface, especially

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[3]. Fang Fang, *Nian hua yi xiao* (Picking a flower with a smile) (Beijing: Qunzhong Press, 1996), pp. 58-59.

in terms of women's emancipation. Given Chinese women's high proportion in fulltime employment (translated as financial independence),[4] Chinese women are indeed "most liberated and most traditional" at the same time.[5] In Other words, Chinese women face dilemmas caused by the contradictory demands of career and family, from both the traditional legacy and modernity. This part examines female consciousness in the representation of dilemmas explored by women writers, and the examination will focus on how they represent the dilemmas and how female consciousness evolves in the dilemmas.

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[4]. According to 1977 statistics, 48% of China's urban workforce comprised of women, as quoted in Emily Honig and Gail Hershatter, *Personal Voices: Chinese Women in the 1980s* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), note 1, p. 356. This rate began to decrease with the development of economic reforms, as women workers were among the first to be laid off by factories and companies. The ideology behind the declining female employment is closely related to the dilemma where women are caught between career and family.

[5]. Chen Xiaoming (ed.), *Zhongguo nüxing xiaoshuo jingxuan* (A selection of stories by Chinese female writers) (Lanzhou: Gansu Renmin Press, 1994). p. 1.

Chapter Four

The Socialist New Woman

A typical image of the socialist new woman is that of a rosy-cheeked, strong-willed, exuberant woman who devotes herself whole-heartedly to the revolutionary/public cause. She is "new" because she is ideally "socialist". From a gender specific point of view, the new socialist woman is a "virilised" image, devoid of gender-specific characterization in spite of its female appearance. A typical stage presentation of the image can be seen in the revolutionary model plays performed during the Cultural Revolution. This idealized image is an ideological projection relatable to a generation of women who spent their formative years under the "Red Banner" and from whom the contemporary Chinese women writers have emerged.

The Socialist New Woman: Fruit of Utopia

What is the unique experience of this generation of Chinese women? Li Xiaojiang, herself belonging to this generation, pointed out that "we have, like fruit borne in the garden of utopia, carried in ourselves striking ideological imprints".[6] In the liberated, socialist, new China, the new generation of Chinese women have the promise of the socialist society: you are socialist, and so you

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[6]. Li Xiaojiang, *Guanyu nüren de dawen* (Answering questions about women), p. 21.

must be equal to men.[7] The promise rang true in the slogan "men and woman are the same", yet the reality was highly problematic. As Li asked:

> Why can boys proudly identify with male identity whilst girls have to learn to live like men? - Why should we learn to be like men if "men and women are the same" already?
>
> Why, whether in the earlier revolutionary age or in the Cultural Revolution, did the storm to get rid of the "Four Olds" first target women's hair styles, clothes, feminine beauty, female experiences, including women's biological characteristics? And why are we striving to change our names into masculine-sounding names, wear men's clothes, and have men's hairstyles?
>
> . . . .
>
> If this is women's liberation, why are girls, in this age of economic reform, looking back for traditional femininity?[8]

Li's questions present a Chinese woman's dilemma, uniquely conspicuous with women's virilization. Perhaps in no other countries have women tried so hard to challenge their own gendered characteristics, their feminine behaviors, thoughts, and sentiments with "stubborn will power" as Li recalled in her book,[9] and in the stories to be discussed later.

The virilization is not just a socialist imperative but a warped projection of a female psychology, which may be traced back to Chinese women's historical reluctance to identify with the term "woman" –*funü* in the Chinese language.[10]

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[7]. Ibid.

[8]. Ibid., p. 11.

[9]. Ibid., p. 9.

[10]. Apart from the well-known fact that Chinese women writers do not like themselves to be called "women writers" and prefer the non-gender specific term "writer", Chinese female college students and feminist critics also dislike the term "women" (*funü*). A female university teacher named her course "Female Literature" (*Nüxing Wenxue*) instead of "Women's Literature" (*Funü Wenxue*). See Li Xiaojiang, *Guanyu nüren de dawen* (Answering questions about women), pp. 15-16.

Morphologically, the Chinese character *fu* has two components, one indicating "female", the other indicating "broom". A female sweeping the floor with a broom – servitude in the family, indicates the meaning of "woman". Phonetically, the character *fu* is a homophone of the character for obedience, and the classical Chinese document expediently explains a woman as a person who obeys men. There are also numerous examples in Chinese idiom which evidence the objectified and oppressed status of women.[11] The term "woman" (*funü*) has a specific historical and cultural content: a woman is "a married mature female who does housework and obeys men".[12] Such a definition has a long history of gender discrimination. In the classical Chinese anthology *Book of Poetry* (compiled in the Spring and Autumn Period; 770-476 BC), a poem writes that

When a son's blest,
    In bed he's laid,
In robe he's drest
    And plays with jade.
His cry is loud,
Of crowns he's proud,
He'll lord o'er crowd.

When daughter's blest,
    She's put aground.
In wrappers drest,
She'll play with spindle round.
She'd do nor wrong nor good

[11]. Meng Yue & Dai Jinhua, *Fuchu lishi dibiao* (Floating out of the horizon of history), pp. 12-24.

[12]. Li Xiaojiang, *Guanyu nüren de dawen* (Answering questions about women), pp. 21-22.

But care for wine and food;

She'd cause her parents dear
Nor woe nor fear.[13]

Whether the ancient poetry recorded a social and familial practice of the day, it certainly testifies to the prevailing sexual discrimination in ancient China. Such sexual discrimination was internalized by women as early as the beginning of the first century. Pan Chao (45-120?), a woman of literary talent, composed instructions for women so that "a woman can humble herself before others":

> Let a woman modestly yield to others; let her respect others; let her put others first, herself last. Should she do something good, let her not mention it; should she do something bad, let her not deny it. Let her bear disgrace; let her even endure when others speak or do evil to her. Always let her seem to tremble and fear.[14]

She further postulated "four virtues" which, together with the "three obediences"[15] can be seen as classical expressions of phallocentrism, a term that "refers to the ways in which patriarchal systems of representation always submit women to models and images defined by and for men."[16] In order that the patriarchal system could be firmly established, the oppression of women went to the extreme. The well-known *Biographies of Virtuous Women* (Lie nü zhuan) first compiled by Liu Xiang, a historian of the Han Dynasty (202 BC - AD 24), with

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[13]. Jiang Shenzhang (ed.), *Shi jing* (Book of poetry), trans. Xu Yuanchong, pp. 379-381.

[14]. Pan Chao (The name is spelt as Ban Zhao in mainland Chinese sound transcription system), "Lessons for Women" in Victor Mair (ed.), *The Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 535.

[15]. The "four virtues" are: 1) womanly virtue, 2) womanly words, 3) womanly bearing, and 4) womanly work; the "three obediences/followings" for women are: 1) obey your father before marriage, 2) obey your husband when married, 3) obey/follow your son if husband dies.

[16]. Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions* (Sydney: Allen & Urwin Pty Ltd, 1989), p. xx.

additions in later centuries, lists more than one hundred biographies of women.[17] I shall quote at length Rey Chow's summary of the book to facilitate an understanding of the difficulties for girls to identify themselves with woman or their "masculinity complex" in Freudian terms.

> Addressing the women anonymously as *lie nü* (virtuous women), *lie fu* (virtuous married women), or *zhen nü* (chaste unmarried woman) after their fathers' or husbands' surnames, these records of famous women in the counties told of girls resisting molestation, widows refusing remarriage from their late teens till the time they died, widows serving their in-laws faithfully, and widows who successfully brought up their children alone. The "life" stories always concluded with a description of the women's "ends," which varied from the most mundane natural deaths (of illness or sorrow) to the most horrifying suicides imaginable: women swallowed metals, cut their necks, stabbed their thighs, starved themselves, hanged themselves, froze themselves in cold water, hurled themselves into wells, and smashed their heads against walls or against their husbands' coffins. Widows are also considered heroic if they deliberately disfigured themselves to make themselves "unmarriageable" and thus chaste forever.[18]

It should be added here that the practice of foot-binding that inflicted untold pains on the female body and crippled the female population in China for about one thousand years must have contributed greatly to Chinese women's aversion of their own gendered sex. In Chinese society, to be a woman is anything but admirable. As recent as the 1980s, Zhang Jie began one of her novellas about women with an old saying: "You are particularly unfortunate, because you were

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[17]. The book was supplemented in later centuries with new volumes of worthy women's biographies. See *Ci Hai* (a Chinese encyclopedia). Shanghai: Cishu Press, 1979. p. 1333.

[18]. Rey Chow, *Women and Chinese Modernity*, note 62, p. 180.

born a woman."[19] In the early 1990s, another woman writer Han Xiaohui wrote an essay simply entitled "Don't Like to Be A Woman" (Bu xihuan zuo nüren).[20]

If a woman detests her gendered sex, then the culture provides little else she can choose but to play the role of a man.[21] This situation engendered a distortion, which found expressions in literary texts ranging from female disguised as male to study with men at college such as in the legend "Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai", to "Mulan Joined the Army", a folk-song from the period of Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-589), to more modern stories of female knight-errants and female generals in which women achieve outstanding military or other masculine merits. Some of these stories belong to folklore, but many, one may believe, were produced by male authors. Even though such texts indicate, as Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua point out, castration anxiety of men (especially that of the male authors themselves) who suffered from "feminization" in their relationship to the emperor or, more generally, to the overwhelmingly centralized patriarchal power,[22] they still refract the unconscious of women. First, in Freudian terms, women also suffered from castration;[23] second, if a nation's literature refracts the collective unconscious of

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[19]. It is an epigraph of Zhang Jie's novella "The Ark". See Zhang Jie, *Love Must Not Be Forgotten*, p. 112.

[20]. Han Xiaohui, "Bu xihuan zuo nüren" (Don't like to be a woman) in Lan Dizhi & Han Xiaohui (eds.), *Meng yao* (Dreaming of the demon). Shengyang: Chunfeng Wenyi Press, 1995.

[21]. Freud explained this as a psychological phenomenon and named it "masculinity complex". If a girl has such a "complex", the "girl may refuse to accept the fact of being castrated, may harden herself in the conviction that she does possess a penis, and may subsequently be compelled to behave as though she were a man." See Sigmund Freud, "Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes" in *On Sexuality* (The Penguin Freud Library Volume 7, Penguin Group, 1991), pp. 336-337.

[22]. See Men Yue & Dai Jinhua, *Fuchu lishi dibiao* (Floating out of the horizon of history), pp. 16-21.

[23]. In a broad sense, the strict linguistic shaping, as quoted before, of the Chinese women can be seen as "castration." However, Chinese women suffered from physical "castration" as well. In his essay "Fetishism," Freud observed that foot-binding is a symbol of the "castration of woman." The bound foot is taken as "another variant" of fetish which, Freud wrote, "might be seen in the

the nation, female unconscious must be part of it, especially in folklore which undergoes less stringent censorship compared with those texts produced by individual authors.[24]

This female desire to get out of womanly conditions became more conspicuous in modern times. Tracing the change of fashion from the Qing Dynasty to the 1940s, Zhang Ailing stated that around 1921 Chinese women began to wear gowns which did not emphasize as much femininity as former fashion varieties, because

> women deliberately wanted to imitate men. Influenced by western culture and intoxicated by the theory of sexual equality, they found that their actual situation was far from ideal. Ashamed and indignant, they rejected everything feminine and wanted, if possible, to uproot women's nature. Therefore the initial cheongsam was austere with a puritan style.[25]

The tendency of male-identification finds more radical expressions in revolution. This can be seen in *Army Life Diary* (Cong jun ji) by Xie Binyin (1906-) in which Xie, who herself joined the army after reading a number of books on revolutionary theory and social sciences, described a short period of life in the revolutionary army lived by herself and her women comrades, most of whom

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Chinese custom of mutilating the female foot and then revering it like a fetish after it has been mutilated. It seems as though the Chinese male wants to thank the woman for having submitted to being castrated." See Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism" in *The Penguin Freud Library Volume 7* (Penguin Group, 1991), p. 357.

[24]. In contrast to the personal unconscious which "consists for the most part of *complexes*", the content of the collective unconscious, according to C. G. Jung, is made "essentially of *archetypes*", which are "motifs" in mythological research, "représentations collectives," "categories of the imagination," "elementary" or "primordial thoughts". See C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious,* trans. R. F. C. Hull; ed. Sir Herbert Read et al. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959), pp. 42-43. The women in male disguise in popular literature as a category of imagination belong to the archetypes of "motifs" and "représentations collectives".

[25]. Zhang Ailing, "Geng yi ji" (The change of fashion) in *Zhang Ailing mingzuo xinshang* (The well-known works by Zhang Ailing; ed. Huang Xiuji) (Beijing: Zhongguo Heping Press, 1996), p. 329.

had originally joined the army to escape arranged marriages. Under the sway of the revolutionary frenzy, the women made "efforts to be the people's pioneers" and "replaced the narrow concept of love with love for the masses and the nation". For the women soldiers,

> their most urgent need was revolution. They all knew that woman could never be emancipated if the old society remained unchanged. One should create long lasting happiness that could be enjoyed by all people in society. Love was a personal matter and . . . love was just a plaything for sons and daughters of the leisurely class.[26]

It was expected, at least unconsciously, that in identifying with revolution, the individual woman would gain a sense of omnipotence, which boys are encouraged to grow up with. This relinquishment of desire went well with the constant need of revolution to suppress personal desire and sexual difference. As Feng Keng (1907-1931) in her epistolary story "Red Diary" (Hong de riji) put in the heroine's voice:

> I have almost forgotten that I am a woman. I have been living a meaningful life in the Red Army for nearly one year and five months! I am a person and a great soldier of x troops and I have brushed aside the difference between men and women.[27]

And she went on to call for other "red women" to "forget for the time being that they are women". The diary ends with slogans: "The red revolution of the world will succeed! Long live the success of the Red Army!" The female image

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[26]. Xie Binyin, "Cong jun ji" (Army life diary) in Yan Chunde (ed.), *Nüxing de dipingxian* (The female horizon) (Beijing: Zhongguo Wenlian Press, 1995), p. 406.

[27]. Feng Keng, "Hong de riji" (Red diary) in Yan Chunde (ed.), *Nüxing de dipingxian* (The female horizon), p. 107.

appeared in Xie and Feng's writings can be seen as the initial type of the new socialist woman with virginal idealism of gender transformation.

Revolution as it happened in China enhanced the "masculinity complex" in Chinese women. For the revolution is violent and therefore masculine. As Mao pointed out:

> Revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery; it cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous. A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another.[28]

Sally Taylor Lieberman views the quotation as an illustration of the way "historical constructions such as 'revolution' and 'class' are gendered".[29] Indeed, the list of things, which revolution is not, belongs to the "feminine" category, whereas violence is entirely masculine. It implies that when women take part in revolution or revolution involves women as it happened in China, women would be "virilized", that is, they would necessarily change or repress their feminine characteristics and "learn to live like men", as Feng Ken's female soldier does in "Red Diary" and as Li Xiaojiang describes contemporary Chinese women's experience.

Such a revolution brought Chinese women out of their traditional sphere only to plunge them into a dilemma, in which they found they had to "learn to live like men", but could not identify with men. As Judith Kegan Gardiner points

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[28]. Mao Zedong, "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan" in vol. 1, *Selected Works of Mao Zedong* (Beijing: Beijing Foreign Languages Press, 1967), p. 28. This famous quotation was tuned into music and sung by all students and other young people in China like a daily hymn during the Cultural Revolution. Quite often it was a musical prelude to Red Guards' violent actions.

[29]. Sally Taylor Lieberman, *The Mother & Narrative Politics in Modern China* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1998), p. 134.

out, "for every aspect of identity as men define it, female experiences varies from the male model," and most importantly female identity is a "process."[30] As part of the process, "virilization" is an impossible assimilation of the feminine by the masculine (because women experience differently as Gardiner says). At a superficial level, it is "a sexual sameness, based on the defeminization of female appearance and its approximation to male standards of dress";[31] at a deeper level, it is a female transgression of established gender boundaries. While the *enforced* sexual sameness contains misogyny and oppression of women, it is not an entirely bad thing. Take the "approximation to male standards of dress" for example, it has been going on, according to Zhang Ailing, since the end of the Qing Dynasty, resulting in the fact that today women can dress up in any style but men cannot wear clothes of female fashions. Virilization, in some ways, is liberating.

Nevertheless, the very word "virilization" points to gender opposition in a misogynistic social situation, which has remained unchanged. Hence the virilized Chinese women (including the so-called "strong women" – *nüqiangren* in Chinese) find themselves ill adjusted to their socially expected roles in both private and public arenas. If such reality is a dilemma, then women writers' consciousness of the dilemma projects virilized heroines trapped in this dilemma in their fiction.

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[30]. Judith Kegan Gardiner, "On Female Identity and Writings by Women" in Elizabeth Abel (ed.), *Writing and Sexual Difference*, p. 182.

[31]. Harriet Evans, *Women and Sexuality in China*, p.2.

The Dilemma of Virilization

How does female consciousness find expression in this dilemma? And what are the expressions? Julia Kristeva talked about "two extremes" of women's writing experiences:

> the first tends to valorize phallic dominance . . . which gives rise to the tendency towards mastery, science, philosophy, professorships, etc. This *virilization of woman* makes of her, ideally, a typical militant who can, in fact, become a veritable striking force in the social revolution (just as it was in the USSR, and just as it is today in China); this doesn't at all justify any dogmatic interpretations that call for "happy sexuality" because *it's taken over by society* – On the other hand, we flee everything considered "phallic" to find refuge in the valorization of a silent underwater body, thus abdicating any entry into history.[32]

If women who write would necessarily become conscious of her own gendered identity, then in view to the spectrum between the two extremes, the female consciousness is orientated towards the female body. This orientation towards the female body would enable the writing to call for a happy sexuality precisely because it is not there. In other words the writer will pour into writing her lived experience as a sexual being without happy sexuality and, thereby, call for it. This section discusses three stories to demonstrate virilization as a dilemma wherein the heroine is obstructed from love, family life, and gaining social respect.

Zhang Xinxin reflected the dilemma first in her story "Where Did I Miss You?" (Wo zai nar cuoguo le ni?).[33] In the story a young woman bus conductor tries her hand at play writing and falls in love with the director of her play, but

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[32]. Quoted from Elaine Marks & Isabelle Courtivron (eds.), *New French Feminisms* (Brighton: The Harvester press, 1981), p. 166 (italics mine).

[33]. References to the story are from Wang fei (ed.), *Zhang Xinxin daibiao zuo* (The representative works of Zhang Xinxin). Zhengzhou: Henan Renmin Press, 1988; 2nd printing, 1994.

finds her virilized temperament (*nanxing qizhi*) unsavoury to him and, moreover, it hinders her from expressing her feelings towards him. The story attributes her failure in love to her "virilization".

The heroine painfully recalls how she has come to her present state. When she is in the countryside receiving re-education, she does the same work as men do, passing the years when a girl is most sensitive to her physical appearance in a few blue jackets while trying to hide her developing feminine curve. When her father is having political trouble, her mother can only shed tears; she has to console her mother, helping her father to resolve his problem, and earn a living. If "weakness and shyness are the necessary ingredients of perfect feminine nature", she has to "tear them off" to find her way in society. Her first boyfriend deserts her after he goes back to the city. Emotionally, she dare not depend on anyone again. When she later becomes a bus conductor in the city, she has to use as much physical strength as men, rudely pushing and yelling at the passengers in the overcrowded bus so that she can sell and check tickets. She has to rely on herself in everything. She says: "God has made me a woman, but society requires me to be like a man. In order to survive, I've tried to hide my feminine characteristics and have gradually become like this without knowing it".[34] Near the end of the story, she remorsefully cries in an interior monologue that she is willing to reform herself into "a real woman" if only she could get his love.[35]

The "real woman" has never existed. The heroine's willingness to reform herself into a "real woman" suggests an ill-adjusted identity, a puzzling fluid status. As Gardiner observes:

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[34]. Ibid., p. 23.

[35]. Ibid., p, 24.

> The problems of female identity presented in women's poetry and prose are rarely difficulties in knowing one's gender; more frequently, they are difficulties in learning how to respond to social rules for what being female means in our culture.[36]

Zhang Xinxin's heroine suffers frustration in failing to come into a relationship of intimacy because the social rules reflected in the man's requirement of her are contradictory. The man values her striving spirit (identified as masculine) but still wishes her to conform to the established feminine norm; yet, she cannot have both, because they counteract each other. The heroine's frustration refracts women's difficulties in meeting the contradictory social demands of women.

Facing the contradictory demands of women, Zhang Xinxin's first-person narrator/heroine comes to choose independence and self-fulfillment rather than love and family life in her controversial novella "On the Same Horizon" (Zai tong yi dipingxian shang, 1981).[37] The title of the novella suggests an equal footing between the couple, but as the narrative goes, it undermines the meaning in the title by showing how the female protagonist starts from a disadvantaged position to strive for self-fulfillment and how the symbolically same place is not quite the same in its gendered value judgement. As soon as she brings herself nearly equal to her husband, the latter feels the balance between them is destroyed and resents the imbalance.

The story thus exposes the wide-spread contradiction of the modern family where the wife becomes self-conscious and unwilling to sacrifice herself to further the husband's career in the name of family interest. This female self-consciousness in the Chinese society largely comes from the realization, as is indicated in the

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[36]. Judith Kegan Gardiner, "On Female Identity and Writings by Women" in Elizabeth Abel(ed.), *Writing and Sexual Difference*, p. 189.

[37]. References to the story are from Wang Fei (ed.), *Zhang Xinxin daibiao zuo* (The representative works of Zhang Xinxin).

story, that the traditional conditions for feminine dependence are no longer existent. As the narrative goes: "Perhaps this world has not changed much for men, but for women it has greatly changed." First, the husband loses his position as the sole supporter and protector of the family, with the wife joining the work force and neither income by itself being adequate to support the family. Second, the emotional inadequacy of the modern man in the highly competitive society has often left the wife emotionally discontented. Third, but not the least important, women have to take part in social competition in the same way as men do. In promotion, pay-rise, house allotting, and every other subsistence advance, the worthiness of women professionals and workers are measured on the same scale (if not higher) as that of men's. With a sober knowledge of her situation, the heroine in "Horizon" gives up the role of the "virtuous wife" to strive for self-accomplishment; to the husband's resentment, the family now is like "a snake with two heads, each striving in an opposite direction". The novella winds up in a restaurant with the couple trying to finalize their divorce.

What is particularly remarkable in Zhang Xinxin's novella is that the heroine's virilization is expressed no longer as lack as in the previous story but as both self-transcendence and self-fulfillment. A recurring symbol in the novella is the Bengal tiger. Painting the tiger, especially the Bengal tiger, is the husband's artistic specialty. The Bengal tiger is admired for its coping and survival ability. Whereas the symbolic meaning of the Bengal tiger expresses the existential angst of the generation of youth, who were sent down to be "re-educated" in the rural areas or remote frontiers, it clearly conveys the determination to succeed. The wife's determination to achieve and to win is no less fierce than that of the husband's. In order to qualify for college training in film directing, she has an abortion and divorces her husband. In her film making, she "would rather cause controversy over characters than tell a perfect story." The heroine's spirit identifies

with that of the writer in real life as the story is clearly autobiographical. For the heroine's strong "virilized" spirit, and what was condemned as "Darwinian individualism",[38] Zhang Xinxin was referred to as "Bengal Tiger" in the Chinese critic field.[39] While the epithet conveys a negative opinion of virilization, Zhang Xinxin's heroine, although still torn by the pain for intimacy, no longer looks back for a "real woman". She stands firmly on a new female horizon. This is a feminist progression in Chinese women's fiction.

If Zhang Xinxin's virilized heroine strives for self-fulfillment, Zhang Jie employs virilization as indictment of the phallocentric and bureaucratic society of China in her novella "The Ark" (Fang zhou, 1982).[40] Her virilized heroines do not have love, family life, or social esteem because they are virilized women.

In the novella, three middle-aged women intellectuals, who are either divorced or separated, share one flat, forming symbolically a boat, like the ark against the hostile external world. They are all working: Jinhua, who divorces because she does not want to be a tool for procreation, is a researcher at an institute for theories of ideology; Liu Quan, who divorces because her husband treats her as a sexual object only, is an interpreter; Liang Qian, who separates from her vulgar husband, is a film director. Through the three women's personal lives and their career struggles relating to their political ideal, private life, and

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[38]. Tang Zhi: "Qiangzhe haishi nuofu: ping 'Zai tong yi dipingxian shang' de sixiang qunxiang" (A strong person or a coward: comment on the thought tendency of "On the Same Horizon") in *Gongkai de "neican"* (The public "internal reference news") (ed. Zhongguo zuojiaxiehui wenyi chuangzuo yanjiuhui) (Changchun: Shidai Wenyi Press, 1986), p. 392.

[39]. Zhang Xinxin was referred to as *Mengjiala Hu* (the Bengal tiger). The epithet is gender neutral in Chinese, which assumes a view of virilisation in both her heroine and herself. But in *Modern Chinese Writers* the epithet is translated into "Bengal Tigress" and used as a title for a report on visiting Zhang Xinxin; for further reference, see Helmut Martin & Jeffrey Kinkley (eds.), *Modern Chinese Writers: Self-Portrayals* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1992), p. 132.

[40]. References to "The Ark" are from Zhang Jie's anthology *Love Must Not Be Forgotten.*

artistic pursuit, the story refracts a female consciousness expressed by Liang Qian:

> Women's liberation is not only a matter of economic and political rights, but includes the recognition, by women themselves as well as by all of society, that we have our own value and significance. Women are people, not merely objects of sex, wives and mothers.[41]

In Chinese society, women who live up to the standard of women's self-liberation stated in the above, with a strong professional capacity, would be seen as "man-like" women, as discussed previously. In addition, Zhang Jie's female characters also bear the outer marks of "virilization". Tempered in the "bloody struggle of life and death" during China's political movements, Jinhua has "arms like a weight-lifter" and a masculine hobby in carpentry; Liu, the most "feminine" of the three, is "as dried up and stale as a piece of old cake" apart from being thoroughly "proletarianized" in appearance; Liang, looks like "a wrinkled, old apple". They all have "coarse and unfeminine" voices. Also they have adopted "masculine" habits such as smoking and piling up their dishes in the sink until thy have none to use; Liang even swears. The so-called "Oriental female virtues" find little expression in them. In a male-dominated society, they seem hard to control, "unpredictable", and "vicious". As a male official thinks of Liang: "If all women were like her, what would the world come to? What would men be able to do about it?"

The novella was criticized for "going to the extreme", for "virilizing its characters"—Chinese women with unique "national characteristics", and for the

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[41]. Ibid., p. 191.

"virilized mood" of the writer herself.[42] Such criticism reveals again a widely accepted, male-defined "real woman", and social disapproval for transgression of gender boundaries.

The female characters' "virilization" to a large extent is not entirely in the writer's literary imagination. Not only Zhang Jie had prototypes for the women characters but also women's "virilization" was a peculiar social phenomenon in China during the Cultural Revolution. In the post-Mao period women still feel the pressure on them to be "virilized", although this "virilization" no longer includes male fashion in clothing styles. Many women may be displeased to find that Chinese society and men in general do not really appreciate their strong capacity and personality and this in turn would provoke their nostalgia towards women's traditional femininity.

The dilemma is widely felt by women. The woman writer Jiang Zidan once worked as an editor-in-chief of a literary journal and she found her job made her "extremely busy, speaking loudly and quickly". Sometimes she could not help but "flare up", and she felt herself "ugly". She opined that women had better not take leading positions,

> because the society operates according to the masculine principle. If you want to do your leading job well, you have to do it according to the masculine principle, and in this way you would become virilized without knowing it.[43]

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[42]. Liu Huiying, *Zouchu nanquan chuantong de fanli: wenxue zhong nanquan yishi de pipan* (Beyond the boundary of patriarchal tradition: criticism of phallocentrism in literature) (Beijing: Sanlian Shudian, 1995), p. 94.

[43]. Jiang Zidan, *Jiang Zidan xiaoshuo jingcui* (Selected stories by Jiang Zidan) (Chengdu: Sichuan Renmin Press, 1998), p. 359.

Having said the above words in an interview, she then added: "I do not want to become virilized. I want to keep my feminine characteristics."[44] The dilemma Jiang Zidan was in refracts a male-dominant social opinion: women should be like women with "feminine characteristics" (*nüren weir*).[45]

Living in this dilemma and facing a changing society, "many women", the woman writer Lu Xinger writes, "feel a crisis in how to adjust yet not to lose themselves". In order to write stories about women, she visited women of various social backgrounds and found a common puzzle: how should a woman live? Women want to be strong with a career (socially interpreted as being man-like), yet they do not want to lose their femininity, love and family life. Faithful to a realist tradition, Lu Xinger tried different alternatives for her heroines in order that they may get out of the dilemma, but none succeeded.[46]

The requirement of femininity seemed to have gone up with time. Apart from being gentle and graceful, the new feminine quality was redefined in the new role of "virtuous wife and good mother" - the traditional feminine model revived and adapted to the 1980s. As Emily Honig and Gail Hershatter quote a Chinese woman worker:

> The fierce-browed female "daring generals" that were propagandized during the ten years of chaos were unbearable to our male compatriots, and even we women found them distasteful. Mother Nature has determined the distinction of our sex. Naturally we must assume the

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[44]. Ibid.

[45]. For years Chinese popular magazines have been teaching women how to increase their "woman's flavor (nüren weir)", which has made some successful career women feel compelled to emphasize their good domestic performance as "virtuous wife and good mother"; reports about these women would also make it a point to stress their "female flavor". Otherwise, these women would give the impression that they are capable but not lovable. See Lu Xinger, "Tantan nüren weir"(Talk about woman's flavor) in *Nüren bu tiansheng* (We are not born women) (Shanghai: Shanghai Shudian Press, 1996), pp. 5-7.

[46]. Lu Xinger, in *Nüren bu tiansheng* (We are not born women), pp. 58-59.

> responsibility of being wife and mother. Furthermore, we must be good wives and good mothers. Therefore, the question is not whether or not being a virtuous wife and good mother is a good thing, but rather, what in the 1980's are the new criteria for being a virtuous wife and good mother?[47]

Whatever the new criteria are, the revival of the traditional ideal of "virtuous wife and good mother" points to another dilemma, which contains, paradoxically, women's transgression as well as their internalization of patriarchal values. Particularly, the internalization of the traditional ideal landed married women in a concrete dilemma between career and family.

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[47]. Emily Honig & Gail Hershatter, *Personal Voices: Chinese Women in the 1980s* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 175.

Chapter Five

Between Career and Family

The female dilemma between career and family was felt and represented quite early on by Chen Hengzhe (1890-1976), the first female professor in China.[1] In her story "Luoyisi's Problem" (Luoyisi de wenti, 1928)[2] she generalized this female dilemma by writing the story in Chinese but making the male protagonist's name English, the female protagonist's name French, and their

[1]. Chen Hengzhe was born in Changzhou, Jiangsu Province in a scholar-official's family. Her mother was good at painting. But Chen was most influenced by her Third Uncle who was radical with western thoughts and her Aunt, a talented woman who protected Chen from an arranged marriage. In her teens, she started her formal education at a girl's high school in Shanghai. In 1915 she went to study history in America, where she supported Hu Shi's proposal for using vernacular Chinese in writing, and was regarded by Hu Shi as his "earliest comrade". When the proposal was still under discussion Chen published "Yiri" (A day), her first story written in vernacular Chinese, in a Chinese overseas students' journal in America. One year earlier than Lu Xun's "Kuangren riji" (A mad man's diary, 1918), it was arguably the first published literary work written in vernacular Chinese. In 1920 Chen accepted Cai Yuanpei's invitation and became a history professor at Beijing University. Chen wrote a number of essays and stories exploring women's liberation problems, apart from her academic works on European history. For more information, see Chen Hengzhe, "My Childhood Pursuit of Education: In Memory of My Uncle, Mr Chuang Szu-chien" (trans. Janet Ng) in Janet Ng and Janice Wickeri (ed.), *May Fourth Women Writers* (Hong Kong: Rendition Paperbacks, 1996), also see Qiao Yigang, *Zhongguo Nüxing de Wenxue Shijie* (The literary world of Chinese women) (Wuhan: Hubei Jiaoyu Press, 1993), pp. 156-169; Yan Chunde, "Chen Hengzhe" in Yan Chunde (ed.), *Ershi shiji Zhongguo zhuming nüzuojai zhuan* (Biographies of famous Chinese women writers in the twentieth century). Beijing: Zhongguo Wenlian Chuban Gongsi, 1995.

[2]. For a reprinting of the story, see Yan Chunde (ed.), *Nüxing de dipingxian* (The female horizon). All my references to the story are from this source.

living environment American.[3] The story is about Luoyisi, a promising female student of philosophy who, in order to pursue her own academic career, chooses to break off her marriage engagement with her beloved mentor, an established scholar of philosophy. Her female consciousness comes out distinctively: "When you men marry, your added economic responsibility is small. Marriage does not affect your scholarly work. But when we women marry, the situation is not the same: home management, education and childcare – no one else can do these for a married woman." Luoyisi's consideration of "home management, education and childcare" as the sole responsibility of women reflects a social context in which the family burden imposed upon and assumed by women turns a married woman into a semi-slave of the family.

During middle age when she becomes a professor in philosophy herself, her emotional needs remain unsatisfied. She feels something important is missing in her life, but she consoles herself that she has had to choose between career and family, and what she has done is of her own choice. Is it really her own choice? Why is it that her ex-fiancé can have both a successful career and a happy family whilst Luoyisi has to choose one and give up the other? There is something preposterous in the social context that determines Luoyisi's life as one of lasting regret, as incomplete, missing something important.

The "emancipation of women, which has caused the greatest revolution in our time",[4] has inevitably triggered off a dramatic change in the institution of marriage and the family. In the United States where Chen Hengzhe studied in the 1920s and where the western cultural atmosphere nurtured the spirit of

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[3]. Due to the European sound of the names, Wendy Larson in her discussion of the story simply put the female's name as "Louise" and the male's name as "Walter". See Wendy Larson, *Women and Writing in Modern China*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 70. For a reprinting of the story, see Yan Chunde (ed.), *Nüxing de dipingxian* (The female horizon).

[4]. Christine Froula, *Modernism's Body: Sex, Culture, and Joyce* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p.72.

Luoyisi's independence, the general direction of the change in marriage, according to sociological investigation, has been toward weakening the marriage institution in the last half of the twentieth century.[5] If in the past women had to remain in the family because of economic needs and patriarchal authority, now with greater access to work and better education, many women strive for personal autonomy. This has resulted in the "fluid" marriage and a "fairly high" rate of divorce. Also couples of dual-careers "will face the problem of fitting each partner's occupational priorities with their family life".[6] Ideally, Luoyisi's problem should no longer exist. However the reality is far from ideal. Women's newly gained autonomy is not entirely blissful. Andrew J. Cherlin laments over the social and "personal costs of greater autonomy". As he writes: "even those who would applaud the gains in autonomy and opportunity for women and in a greater emphasis on love and companionship must acknowledge that the benefits have been achieved at a substantial cost. . . . The costs include a greater risk of never marrying, a life trajectory that most Americans don't want but more are heading for."[7] Luoyisi's problem anticipated the "personal costs" raised by sociologists here. Is there a way to solve Luoyisi's problem? A way that can meet women's emotional needs, including having children, and allow them to have career fulfillment?

The exploration of this problem by Chinese women writers began against a background of overwhelming family-centered culture. While Luoyisi chooses not to marry and to engage in academic pursuit, the majority of Chinese women do not have the freedom or courage to choose, because "spinsters" have to

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[5]. Andrew J. Cherlin, *Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage* (revised and enlarged edition) (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 136-140.

[6]. Ibid., p. 137.

[7]. Ibid., p. 139.

endure great social pressure from all kinds of people. Shanshan in Zhang Jie's "Love Must Not Be Forgotten" calls on women to resist the pressure; the story "Because I am a Thirty-year Old Girl" (Yinwei wo shi sanshi sui de guniang) by Xu Naijian, indignantly protests against the social pressure on unmarried women.[8] On the other hand, while Luoyisi may choose family life and give up career, Chinese women today usually do not have the luxury of not doing paid work because the husband's income is not enough to support a family consisting of a couple and a child. Their participation in the labor force is not "only allowed" on the condition that "they continue to fulfill their first responsibility in the home",[9] but a necessity as important as their responsibility in the home. Thus, for many Chinese women, marriage is a difficult choice they have to make, and once married their daily life becomes a struggle between two workloads. The general situation of "Luoyisi's problem" is not improved, but may have become worse. Kang Keqing, the president of the All China Women's Federation, pointed out in 1983 that "heavy household chores still adversely affect the progress and health of women."[10] Moreover, with the development of the market economy, patriarchal ideology has been revived with a vengeance. Women have been among the first to be laid off by factories and companies. One major concern amid a complex of reasons for this phenomenon is that a woman's natural environment is at home being a housewife.[11]

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[8]. A reprinting of the story can be found in Li Ziyun (ed.), *Zhongguo Nüxing Xiaoshuo Xuan* (Selected stories by Chinese female writers). Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co., Ltd., 1995.

[9]. Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction*, p. 53.

[10]. Margery Wolf, *Revolution Postponed: Women in Contemporary China*. p. 262.

[11]. For more information, one may read Li Xiaojiang, "Economic Reform and the Awakening of Chinese Women's Collective Consciousness" (trans. S. katherine Campbell) and Margret Y. K. Woo, "Chinese Women Workers: the Delicate Balance Between Protection and Equality" in Christina K. Gilmartin, Gail Hershatter, Lisa Rofel, and Tyrene White (eds.), *Engerdering China: Women, Culture, and the State*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press, 1994.

This chapter investigates the representation of this female dilemma by Shen Rong, a well-known woman writer. The investigation will begin from the high-sounding revolutionary rhetoric relating to the dilemma, and then move on to a discussion of career women's plight, and finally to an analysis of the limit in the ways out of the dilemma.

Re-presenting the Old Dilemma

One of the earliest texts to explore women's relation to career and family after the Cultural Revolution is Shen Rong's "Spring-time Forever" (Yongyuan shi chuntian; 1979).[12] The story has been mainly read in two ways. On the one hand, it is read as a love story between revolutionary cadres in which the heroine Han Lamei represents a woman revolutionary's "warm, noble, and sacred love", typical of "Chinese women's steadfast and reserved loyalty towards love". Such a reading also sees the story as a historical reflection about the problem of the so-called "capitalist roader".[13] The other reading interprets the story as dealing with the problem of "what defines an ideal woman" in Chinese society in the early 1980s.[14] In both readings the heroine Han Lamei, apart from her role in a love relationship, is a representation of the truly revolutionary cadre wrongly accused of as a "capitalist roader" during the Cultural Revolution, in contrast to some other cadres who developed a bourgeois life style. Such readings entirely neglected the existence of another female character Shi Lihua, whom Shen Rong

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[12]. Shen Rong, "Yongyuan shi chuntian" (Spring-time forever) in *Shen Rong ji* (Shen Rong anthology). Fuzhou: Haixia Wenyi Press, 1986.

[13]. Xie Xiang, "Mingzu turang yunyu de huaduo" ("The flowers nurtured by national soil " in *Wuhan Daxue xuebao* (The academic journal of Wuhan University), 2 (1982); and Wang Chunyuang, "Shen Rong lun" (On Shen Rong) in *Xiangdai zuojia* (Modern writers), 11 (1984).

[14]. Wendy Larson, "Women, Writers, Social Reform: Three Issues in Shen Rong's Fiction" in Michael S. Duke (ed.), *Modern Chinese Women Writers: Critical Appraisals* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1989), pp. 179-183.

depicts to form a contrast to Han on the problem of the family. Through this contrast the women's dilemma between career and family was first explored after the Cultural Revolution.

The story is told to the female writer/narrator by Han's former husband Li Mengyu, after Han's death, and thus it can be read as his story through which the authorial voice resounds, accentuating a female consciousness of women's dilemma of having to choose between career and family. Li tells the story because Han's life is an "extraordinarily moving story". One may understand that Han's life story is "extraordinarily moving" to Li because Han remains physically, emotionally, and spiritually loyal to him and so to socialism. Li rescues Han from the abuse of a landlord after which Han becomes a soldier and later his wife. Believing that Han (then pregnant) is killed during the war years, Li marries Shi after liberation. But Han never believes that he is dead and keeps looking for him while she studies and works for hydraulic projects. When she finds him living a privileged cadre's life with his second wife and children, she keeps quiet and never makes any intrusion. Her deep love for Li is demonstrated by the fact that for more than twenty years she covers herself with their marriage souvenir: half of an army blanket (the other half is Li's but Li has long disposed of it). During the Cultural Revolution, when Li is tortured as a "capitalist roader" and "traitor", Han risks her own life to defend him, and for this she is also tortured as a "capitalist roader" and "Li Menyu's stinking old woman" as well. In spite of her sufferings, Han works for her hydraulic project as wholeheartedly as usual. She finally dies at a hydraulic construction site in a storm. In her last moment, she feels greatly consoled with Li at her side. Holding his hand in hers, she says contentedly to him: "When I took part in the revolution you were with me. Now when I am dying you are at my side."

With her loyalty to Li, her quietness towards Li's second marriage, and her dynamic revolutionary spirit, Han is acclaimed as a socialist new woman, whose revolutionary noble character conflates with traditional women's virtues. As a "feminist" critic comments admiringly of Han: "In Han Lamei there are the virtues of the Oriental women: steadfast, persevering, broad-minded, and full of self-sacrificing spirit. . . . She displays the traditional virtues of Chinese women."[15] This mixture of Han's "noble" character contrasts with Li's "deteriorating" quality as a cadre, as he lives a privileged comfortable life alienated from the masses whom he is supposed to serve. Also it contrasts with Li's wife Shi, who spends her energy on domestic life only. While the story addresses the problem of the revolutionary cadres, who were harshly criticized and physically tortured during the Cultural Revolution, the text, as Wendy Larson points out, depicts for the reader "an ideal woman" in Han Lamei.[16]

However, the story does not, as Larson suggests, "denigrate housework and family as corrupting to the spirit of the revolution".[17] On the contrary, it raises the complicated problem of the family for revolutionaries, especially for female cadres. The family problem is raised through the lives of Han and Shi. In spite of the glorified characterization of Han, the socialist heroine, like Janus, has another side, which situates her on the margin of family life, where she looks into a loving relationship with a lifelong longing. A gender-conscious sympathy for Han, who gives up raising her daughter for hydraulic work and lives a homeless

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[15]. Jing Ge & Xue Mingming (ed.), *Hong shuo de huaduo: Lun xinshiqi nüxing xiaoshuo* (Red and rich flowers: On the women novels of the new time) (Beijing: Minzu Press, 1995), pp. 104-105.

[16]. Wendy Larson, "Women, Writers, Social Reform: Three Issues in Shen Rong's Fiction" in Michael S. Duke (ed.), *Chinese Women Writers: Critical Appraisals*, pp. 180-184.

[17]. Ibid., p. 183.

life, is conveyed in Li's monologue as the latter sees Han's half blanket in her bedroom:

> I sat down and saw that thin half blanket again. I walked over and held it in my hand for a long time. This half blanket recorded our happy reunions and sad separations, and accompanied her every night throughout all these hard years. When she covered herself with this half blanket at night, what did she feel? Warmth or loneliness? Life was very cruel to her. She had contributed all she had, but got nothing in return.[18]

Although much is left unspoken, it is in this revelation of the sad aspect of Han's life as a woman that Shen Rong deviated from the utopian and eulogistic rhetoric of portraying an ideal woman. As the writing consciousness re-accentuates through Han's unspoken sadness the importance of a private sexual relationship, Li's heroic logic that, for the Communist Party members, "the greatest happiness" lies in "the victory of class struggle and production struggle", is contradicted and discredited. If Han's life is revealed as incomplete and solitary, the socialist heroine shares Luoyisi's problem raised half a century ago.

A further inquiry about the family comes out through a conversation between Li and Shi, a kind and sensible woman who regards her husband's work as of foremost importance. The conversation is recalled by Li and is worth quoting at length, because its very length as well as the content indicates the eminence of the family problem in the narrative.

> As the saying goes: "Every family has its own difficulties." My family is no exception. One night when I came home it was already midnight. Lihua [Shi] was still up, reading a novel on a chair. I picked up the book and found it was Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. I turned to its first page and read the

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[18]. Shen Rong, "Yongyuan shi chuntian" (Spring-time forever) in *Shen Rong Ji* (Shen Rong anthology), p. 27.

first sentence: "Happy families are all the same; unhappy families have their different misfortunes." I smiled and put down the book.

"Don't you agree with the saying?" Lihua asked me seriously.

"I have never thought about it."

"Then think about it. Does Tolstoy sound reasonable?"

"To us communists, happiness is not in the family. The victory of class struggle and production struggle is our greatest happiness."

"Then how about the family?" She asked again.

"As to the small family of one's own, it is not important. How many hours do we spend at home?"

She fell into silence, obviously discontented with my answer. So I asked:

"Then, how do you look at this problem?"

"I think my family is both happy and unhappy. Of the whole population of China, how many people can enjoy a living standard like ours? Of course, material life is not so important. Spiritually, we do not have conflicts between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, between father-in-law and son-in-law; we respect each other and do not interfere with each other. Isn't this a kind of happiness?"[19]

However, Shi considers it her "misfortune" to be shut up within this "happy family", yet she cannot, as Li suggests, "walk out of the family to take part in the struggles and masses" to gain *his* kind of "happiness", because she has to look after Li and their three children. She has to be resigned to the role of Li's caretaker so that Li can work better. Ironically, Shi, as a "liberated" woman, has to sacrifice her own "happiness" to enable her husband to gain "happiness" in "struggles and masses", although she is unlikely to appreciate such "happiness" anyway.

Just as Han's career alienates her from family life, Shi's family life obstructs her from developing a career. In both cases the female protagonists cherish a deep longing for what they cannot have or be. As they each represent

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[19]. Ibid., p. 19.

one side in the contradiction between career and family, they live a "one-sided", unfulfilled life. In contrast, with two women loving him, Li enjoys the ideal life of a man: a comfortable physical existence attended by his second wife Shi and an ennobling spiritual life inspired by his first wife Han. Yet, as neither woman feels fulfilled in their respective roles in public work and private sphere, neither is happy. The problem of the family is raised, but the women's dilemma between career and family remains unsolved.

The "Selfish" Wife: to Be or Not to Be

One of the most well known stories in the early 1980s is Shen Rong's novella "At Middle Age" (Ren dao zhongnian; 1981).[20] The story provides a detailed description of a woman doctor's struggle with the dilemma between career and family, which eventually leads to her physical breakdown. The story was made into a film based on a script written by Shen Rong herself in 1983. The film became an immediate hit, as it was instantly understood in China as representing the plight of a generation of Chinese intellectuals who were of the same age as the middle-aged heroine.[21]

Due to its sociopolitical background and its apparently gender-neutral political message, the story has been read in other ways, especially outside

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[20]. Shen Rong, "At Middle Age" in her anthology *At Middle Age*. Beijing: Panda Books, 1986.

[21]. Chambers English Dictionary defines an "intellectual" as "a person of superior intellect or enlightenment (often used to suggest doubt as to practical sagacity)". In western critical discourses, the "intellectual" usually refers to knowledgeable people of rational thoughts and critical spirit. When the term is a translation of Chinese *zhishi fenzi*, it applies, in the Chinese context, to people who have received professional training in tertiary education or equivalent knowledge. Whilst independent thinking could well be a striking feature of some intellectuals, this capacity was almost non-existent in many who fell into the intellectual's category in Mao's China, because of the constant "thought reform", backed up by labor camps and prison, imposed upon mainland Chinese intellectuals. In her reflection on Chinese intellectuals, He Qinglian referred to Chinese intellectuals as a "rice bowl group" ("*fanwan jituan*"), whose livelihood depends on the government and who, therefore, have to bend their intellectual capacity to the latter's dictatorship. See He Qinglian, *Zhongguo de xianjin* (The accumulation of primary capital in China), (Hong Kong: Mingjing Press, 1996), p. 401.

China.[22] My discussion will emphasize that Shen Rong's insight of the middle-aged intellectuals' dilemma is inscribed by a female consciousness not only of the weight of the "trivial" details of family life but also of women's psychological burden caused by the dilemma between career and family. In the following section I shall first introduce "At Middle Age" briefly and then move on to argue that the female professional's dilemma between career and family is not only external but also internal as Shen Rong depicts. I shall further discuss the dilemma as represented in Shen Rong's "Wrong! Wrong! Wrong!" (Cuo! cuo! cuo!).[23] My discussion aims to show that Shen Rong presented no way out of the dilemma whether the woman involved is "selfish" or not.

In "At Middle Age" the central character is Lu Wenting, a middle-aged female ophthalmologist of a hospital, where she has worked for eighteen years. The story begins with Lu hospitalized due to a breakdown caused apparently by exhaustion from overworking – doing three operations in succession. Through a flashback of her mental activities interspersed with a plot narrative, her life story is told and the double dilemma manifests.

Lu is married with two children. Her husband Fu Jiajie is a scientist. The family of four live in an eleven-square-meter room with only one desk shared alternatively by three: Lu, Fu, and their son, a primary school pupil. Financially hard up, they cannot afford a pair of sneakers for their son. Their living conditions represent the general plight of Chinese intellectuals caused by years of political discrimination which leads to material deprivation. Living in cramped conditions, Lu often has to work long hours because there is a shortage

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[22]. For example, Wendy Larson read the story as exploring alternatives for intellectuals to solve their problems. See Wendy Larson, "Women, Writers, Social Reform: Three Issues in Shen Rong's Fiction" in Michael S. Duke (ed.), *Chinese Women Writers: Critical Appraisals*, pp. 174-176. The story's reception in China will be discussed later.

[23]. All references to the story are from Shen Rong's anthology *Lande lihun* (Too lazy to divorce). Beijing: Huayi Press, 1993.

of doctors, especially experienced doctors like her. She often does operations in succession, and visits her patients in her after-hours. During lunch break, she has to rush home to get lunch ready so that her son can go to school in time. Every night after her son finishes his homework, Lu occupies the desk to read her medical books and journals, as her profession requires her to catch up with the latest developments in her field. Her husband takes his turn using the desk to study after Lu goes to bed. For ten years she has never been to any parks and she has never noticed the flowers in the gardens of the hospital. Even plaiting her daughter's hair becomes a luxury for which she can hardly afford time. In her difficult life, Lu thinks that she has probably made a mistake in getting married.

The story came out at the special historical moment after the Cultural Revolution when intellectuals were required to contribute to the Four Modernizations with their expertise after years of suffering from political discrimination. The urgency to abolish the discrimination was such that even Deng Xiaoping, then the paramount leader, had to emphasize that "we must form an atmosphere within the Party: respect knowledge and knowledgeable personnel. We must oppose the erroneous idea of not respecting intellectuals."[24] Critics generally extolled the image of Lu as a "brilliant image of the socialist new person", and the writer was recognized for her courageous and artistic exposition of the plight of the middle-aged intellectuals and professionals. The story struck the sentimental chords in the hearts of intellectuals who, as members of the audience or professional critics, openly confessed that they were moved to tears by the story.[25] The novella heralded a spate of reportage literature in national

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[24]. Deng Xiaoping, *Selected Writings of Deng Xiaoping* (1975-1982); trans. The Bureau for the Compilation and Translation of Works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin. (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1984), p. 38.

[25]. Shen Rong, "Xie zai 'Ren dao zhongnian' dianying kai ying zhi qian"(Written at the time when the film "At Middle Age" is released) in He Huoren (ed.), *Shen Rong yanjiu zhuanji* (Research essays on Shen Rong) (Guiyang: Guizhou Renmin Press, 1986), p. 67.

newspapers and magazines about newly deceased middle-aged intellectuals and professionals—often long articles demonstrating their selfless spirit in contrast to their appalling working and living conditions. The social repercussions even extended to the government, resulting in the fact that the official national newspaper *Health* published an article urging the minister of the Health Ministry to read the story.[26]

Notwithstanding the nationwide repercussions, the gendered nature of the heroine's dilemma remained unnoticed until Li Xiaojiang published her essay in 1987.[27] Li compares the individual person's social life as a net, but for men the net can be centrally controlled through one "single rope", which is their career. The priority of career governs a man's life. In contrast, the net for women does not have such a prioritized "rope", and the "multiple aspects of a woman's life demands her equal attention"; any "mishandling" in one aspect may ruin her entire life and make it a tragedy.

However, some pre-existing concepts affected the accuracy of Li Xiaojiang's analysis. For example, to say "mishandling" implies a "correct handling" which would make all happy. Yet, in the multiple demands of women, any handling could be a "mishandling" as it would inevitably give priority to one demand and neglect others. Moreover, the difference between men's life networks and woman's life networks is not a given but made. Women's inability to prioritize their career over family duties reflects, among other things, their internalization of patriarchal ideology, especially the traditional concept of

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[26]. Gladys Yang, "A New Woman Writer Shen Rong and her Story 'At Middle Age'" in *Chinese Literature*, (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press) 10 (1981).

[27]. A reading of the double burden is first published by Li Xiaojiang in her "*Dangdai funü wenxue zhong zhiye funü wenti* " (The problem of professional women in contemporary women's literature), *Wenyi pinglun* (Literature and art review) vol. 3, 1987.

"virtuous wife and good mother". This internalization forms an internal dilemma and has enormous adverse effect on women themselves.

In "At Middle Age", Lu is constantly tortured by her compunction for failing her husband and her children because she spends most of her time and energy on her professional work. She condemns herself for being "a selfish woman, who thinks only about her work", as she says to her husband, "I have a home but I have paid it little attention. Even when I am not working, my mind is preoccupied with my patients. I haven't been a good wife or mother." Driven by this compunction she makes a "heroic decision" that her husband should move to his institute so that he can leave her and the children, who are "hampering" him, and turn his "eight-hour working day into a sixteen-hour one". The decision instantly relieves her psychological burden. As she suggests it, "[h]er face was glowing, her eyes dancing. Obviously she was very pleased with the idea." Her sense of guilt for failing to be a good wife and mother weighs so much on her heart that when she regains her consciousness from a coma, feeling death is near, she begs in her heart for her husband's forgiveness. This guilt is a psychological burden, which contributes to her final collapse. Why does Lu have such a psychological burden and blame herself so much for being a dedicated doctor?

To further pursue the problem, one may find a widely accepted assumption that family duties are a woman's first priority. This assumption keeps men from blame if they do not perform domestic duties. Indeed, it makes domestic performance humiliating for them. This is why Lu's husband is so sarcastic about his "stunning" ability to do housework. And it is also why the writer, among all sorts of possibilities, chose his domestic performance as the very proof that the Cultural Revolution has driven him to be what he is not and should not be. The general acceptance of this assumption by both women and

men guarantees manliness for men. This assumption implies a male norm, to which men are perhaps only too happy to conform. In many family dramas the assumption is also the basis for harmonious conjugal feelings. Once the assumption is challenged, psychological imbalance would follow. And in this situation even if a woman could prioritize her career over domestic duties which her husband, therefore, has to perform, she may still not be happy because conjugal love may no longer exist as a consequence of psychological imbalance on the husband's side. Shen Rong's story "Wrong! Wrong! Wrong!" (Cuo! cuo! cuo!) further dramatizes the dilemma through role reversal in the family and tells another family tragedy related to this assumption of patriarchal ideology.

Experimenting with a new style, the novella is formed entirely by a husband's inner monologue oriented towards his newly deceased wife, whose own voice is therefore suppressed. Consciously or not, Shen's formal experiment points to a female aphasia, which can be traced back to the stories discussed previously whose heroines are either dead as in "Spring-time Forever" or very quiet as in "At Middle Age".

In the monologue Ruqing, the husband, recounts the happy beginning of their marriage and how the marriage lands on the rocks. A representative reading of the story by a Chinese feminist critic asserts it to be "a tragedy of incompatible personalities" and the incompatibility is mainly caused by the wife Huilian because "as wife and mother, she has no sense of responsibility. She is willful, selfish, refusing to be the mistress of the family; to the sacrifices her husband makes for the family, she simply turns a blind eye." In a word, she "has no courage to face the mundane family life of having children, washing diapers, cooking and washing clothes." Furthermore, "as an actress, she lacks gift and talent . . . unable to create a brilliant career out of performing arts." As the critic reads, Ruqing is a model husband, and "if he has any shortcoming, it is his over-

indulgence of Huilian." Therefore, his self-condemnation for "wiping out" Huilian's "love flame" and "creating the cold atmosphere of the family life" is "groundless and illogical". It is "merely an impulsive slip at the moment of mourning".[28]

The impulsive slip, according to Freudian theory, is actually important in revealing the unconsciousness of the speaker. Also, in Bakhtinian thought words are always uttered with "sideways glances". From this point of view and given its event-clarifying nature, Ruqing's mournful monologue actually contains his "sideways" self-defense, attempting to prove that he should not be held responsible for the failure of their marriage and the death of his wife. The impulsive slip towards the end of Ruqing's apologetic self-clarification, therefore, points to "the truth at which the hero must and indeed ultimately does arrive through clarifying the events to himself".[29] Namely, he should be held partly responsible for Huilian's unhappy life and death at middle age.

Reading the monologue in this light reveals that what happens is a tragedy caused by role reversal: the man shoulders the double burden, working and doing all the housework; the woman tries to make career progress, taking home as a recuperative haven. However, their psychical formations informed by love romance and a more obviously phallocentric tradition contradict their "abnormal" arrangement of married life. Huilian entertains a phallocentric love ideal which she has absorbed from literature and her westernized professional training as an actress. She takes Ruqing for a father-like lover, expecting to get "not only instructions but also loving indulgence" from him. As editor of a

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[28]. Liu Beibei, "Shen Rong" in Yan Chunde (ed.), *Ershi shiji Zhongguo zhuming nüzuojia zhuan* (Biographies of famous Chinese women writers in the 20th Century) Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian chuban gongsi, 1995.

[29]. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. & trans. Caryl Emerson; intro. Wayne C. Booth (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984), p. 55.

literary magazine, Ruqing absorbs much the same male-centered love romance. His inflated masculine ego is displayed in a vivid passage, where he imagines Huilian, lonely and neglected by her parents, has been waiting for him to take her to a happy world since her childhood. On their wedding day they put up a boat paper-cut, symbolizing Ruqing's imaginary power to ferry Huilian to a world of happiness. While such imagination satisfies Ruqing's inflated ego, it also pleases Huilian with its imaginary dedication and protection.

Their love ideal crashes on the rocks in the mundane trivialities of their married life. Literally faithful to her role in the humanist love ideal (being admired and loved as the heroine in love romance), Huilian remains unable to see the house chores but concentrates on her career development, whilst Ruqing, split between the role of a dedicated lover assigned by love romance and the more traditional role of a husband who is not supposed to do house chores, becomes increasingly grumpy about having to do them and looking after their new-born. His resentment and disappointment with Huilian affect their relationship and, in turn, Huilian becomes resentful and apathetic. His phallocentric mentality prevents him from understanding Huilian. Instead, he feels confused at her "silence, melancholy, and tears" and tires of her "making scenes for no reason at all". Actually, all this is just Huilian's feminine way of expressing her disappointment with their married life.

As an ambitious actress, Huilian has more reasons than men to regard the family as an emotionally recuperative haven where she can relax and be protected, because she has to struggle harder than men in a male-centered world. Ruqing knows little about this part of her life. Only after she is hospitalized he learns that Huilian, as a graduate from the Central Drama Institute, has been discriminated against and that to gain a chance to play a major role, an actress often has to have a "certain [sexual] relationship with the

male director". Aloof and idealistic, Huilian cannot reconcile with such reality. In the Cultural Revolution she withdrew from the stage; when she returned she was no longer young and could play only secondary roles. It is under the double frustration from career and family life that Huilian falls ill and dies at middle age.

The family tragedy shows that a simple reversal of family roles, without changing the phallocentric mentality, does not resolve a woman's dilemma between career and family. Although Huilian does not perform woman's traditional family duties, Ruqing's sour mood from having to shoulder a double burden ruins her dream of love and hence her life.

As a wife and mother, Huilian's refusal to do housework makes her an anomaly against the socialist new women with "Oriental virtues". She contrasts negatively with her performing colleague in a newspaper report Shen Rong presented in "Too Lazy to Divorce" (Lan de li hun), which goes as follows:

> A wonderful actress on the stage and a good wife at home, the famous drama actress Guo Lili economically planned family expenditures and did all housework to support her husband, making his frontier science research project a success. They have been commended as a Model Family.[30]

As an actress, Guo is a laudable model and Huilian an aberrant freak, who cannot be tolerated by patriarchal society and therefore "naturally" dies at middle age. Huilian's death, however, reminds one of Lu's miraculous recovery from the brink of death ("At Middle Age"). Lu is a model of "the socialist new woman with national characteristics", therefore, "naturally" she should survive. The heroine's survival or death is not entirely determined by the writer's artistic arrangement. To a large extent, it is over-determined by the sociopolitical milieu, of which the

woman writer's text is symptomatic. Nevertheless, the untold sadness which contributes to Huilian's death at middle age conveys a negative textual stand towards women's existential conditions.

As Shen Rong's texts show so far, death or narrow escape from death is the only way out of the dilemma for those women, who venture off the traditional paths (as Han Lamei and Huilian) or who try to meet demands from both career and the family (as Lu Wenting does). As long as women themselves stay unconscious of patriarchal influence upon themselves and the phallocentrically informed social opinion and male mentality stay intact, the women's dilemma between career and family will remain.

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[30]. Shen Rong, *Lande lihun* (Too lazy to divorce), p. 11.

Chapter Six

Rewriting Motherhood

In a woman's dilemma between career and family, what restricts her career fulfillment most is the role of the mother – the most valued and most self-sacrificing role for a woman. The traditional norm of the "virtuous wife and good mother" assumes a self-sacrificing woman who is completely devoted to her husband and children. Yet the traditional motherhood was not entirely an imposition, but to some extent a life necessity that brought practical benefit to women.

This benefit manifested in terms of the mother's livelihood. In return for the mother's service, the Confucian morality claims that an adult son owes filial piety, not only to his father but also to his mother, even though the mother's position is inferior to that of the father in the Confucian order. The last "obedience/following" that a woman should obey/follow her oldest son after her husband's death in the notorious three "obediences/followings" was generally misunderstood. As Zhang Huaicheng points out, the injunction means a widowed woman cannot engage in public activities, nor can she directly interfere with big family decisions – in such things she must depend on her son; it also means that the social status of the widowed woman

depends on the social status of the son.[1] Indeed, scholars have found ample evidence that a widow may still claim filial piety from her sons in practical life. Sally Taylor Lieberman points out that

> a woman's status as parent was by no means canceled out by her husband's death. Traditional texts celebrate displays of filial devotion to married and widowed mothers alike and laud maternal efforts to steer the sons down the paths of success and righteousness.[2]

Indeed, the famous novel *The Dream of the Red Mansions* well demonstrates the privilege which the old dowager enjoys in an aristocratic family.

From the old dowager's luxurious life, provided first by her husband and then by her sons after her husband's death in *The Dream of the Red Mansions*, I would like to argue for a pragmatic consideration here. If women married for livelihood in the past, as was the case, then a marriage without children or sons was not enough. She must have children, ideally sons, to guarantee her survival. In this consideration, maternal love contained a pragmatic, personal need, and the Confucian code of filial piety confirmed for the mother the pragmatic benefit of reproduction and child-rearing. This consideration is important. For once the pragmatic need of mothering for survival is removed from a woman's life (which is happening today), the moral and emotional codes concerning mothering would be challenged by changes in the narratives of motherhood. Such changes in Chinese women

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[1]. Zhang Huaicheng, *Zhongguo de jiating yu lunli* (Family and ethics in China), p. 222.

[2]. Sally Taylor Lieberman, *The Mother & Narrative Politics in Modern China* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1998), p. 25.

writers' texts amount to a rewriting of motherhood, which I shall discuss in this chapter.

To discuss this rewriting, it is necessary to examine briefly the conventional code of motherhood. In traditional Chinese culture, the maternal image was codified in such idioms as "strict father and kind mother" (*yanfu cimu*) and "virtuous wife and good mother" (*xianqi liangmu*). Yet in dynastic times, there was not much historical or literary narrative to substantiate a loving maternal image.[3] Ancient mythology evidences respect and worship to the mother. For example, in the Shang Dynasty the sun and the moon were respectively referred to as "East Mother" (Dong Mu) and West Mother (Xi Mu).[4] The mother was not to be disobeyed by her children. Within the family the mother shared the father's right to educate and punish children as well as the right to arrange their marriages. To maintain the hierarchical social and familial order, the traditional Chinese culture emphasizes children's filial piety.[5]

However, in the May Fourth cultural rebellion against Confucianism and the Father, the mother image was emphasized and reconstructed with national and revolutionary significance. It was during this period, Lieberman points out, that "an idealized maternal figure became a staple of China's New Literature":

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[3]. There may be a few examples to show the good mother, such as the popular story about how Mencius' mother moved house several times so as to avoid undesirable influence upon her son (which has condensed into the well-known proverb: *Mengmu zelin*).

[4]. Du Fangqin, *Nuxing guangnian de yanbian* (The Change of the female concept), p. 18.

[5]. A case in point is the popular twenty-four stories of filial piety. Lu Xun criticized the prevalence of those stories and their effect on children's psyche in his "Ershisi xiao tu" (The pictures of the twenty-four stories of filial piety); see *Lu Xun, Zhaohua xishi* (Gather morning flowers in the evening). Hong Kong: Sanlian Shudian, 1958; 2nd printing, 1972.

> A gentle, nurturing figure, selflessly and naturally loving, sometimes suffering, occasionally joyful, her image, voice, and movements were evoked in a sentimental linguistic register. Opposite her was the child, usually male: the infant, a new, as-yet-unformed being unfolding in her embrace; the schoolboy making his first forays into the world; or the adult-child yearning for, and sometimes finding, solace and strength in her love.[6]

The women writers, who newly emerged on the literary scene at the time, also joined in the idealization of the mother. For example, Feng Yuanjun's courageous and rebellious female protagonists, in their search for freedom and fight against feudalism, are "deeply attached to the unique boundless maternal love". "More than one daughter in her stories, for the sake of her mother, hesitates to sever an arranged marriage."[7] And even Lu Yin, who suffered from discrimination from her own mother since she was born and who, when grown up, did everything against her mother's wishes, was also "anxious not to sadden her mother."[8] In the women writers' stories, the mother was "old and worried", a symbol of the suffering and the weak; she could not but carry out the orders of the father; on the other hand she was "idealized" and portrayed as a loving mother. Such an image of maternal love, as Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua observed, was "abstract and vague" in women's literature of the time.[9] It was set up to provide a "gendered identity" so as to "fill up the structural lack in terms of

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[6]. Ibid.

[7]. Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua, *Fuchu lishi dibiao* (Floating out the horizon of history), p. 17.

[8]. Ibid., p. 18. For more information about Lu Yin's suffering at her own mother's hand, see Lu Yin, "Autobiography" (trans. Amy Dooling) in Janet Ng and Janice Wickeri (eds.), *May Forth Women Writers: Memoirs* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1966)

[9]. Ibid.

subjectivity in the psyche of a generation of rebellious daughters at a cultural level."[10]

If there was any "structural lack in terms of subjectivity" for the 'rebellious daughters", such a lack could also be found in their male peers. For, in actuality, the young male writers produced more texts embracing the image of a tender, loving mother. The kindness of the imaginary mother, in contrast to the oppressive Father, represents kindness and beauty in morality, and the mother figure based on love points to a subjectivity sought after not only by the young women writers but also by their male peers. In the imaginary mother figure, there was the general assumption of maternal love rooted in Nature. The reconstruction of motherhood, therefore, amounted to a rediscovery of genuine human nature at the time when traditional Chinese characters were castigated by the young writers. Given the historical meaning of the May Fourth literature in nationalism, modernization, and revolution, the idealization of the mother figure, Lieberman points out, "was part of a deliberate and collective effort by young intellectuals to discover a genuine human nature that could serve as the basis for more humane social relations in a future modern society".[11]

The reconstruction of the mother figure, based on her biological function, presumed the mother to be in possession of an innate maternal love, which can be used to oppose the artificiality of the old social order. Such reconstruction of the mother's nature consolidated the restrictive, self-sacrificing role of the mother and served to further erase women's personhood. Functioning in such a way, the reconstruction of the mother figure contradicted its mission of modernization. For, if as Lieberman points out, in China as in the

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[10]. Ibid., p. 20.

[11]. Sally Taylor Lieberman, *The Mother & Narrative Politics in Modern China,* p. 20.

west, the modern individual was first articulated in a woman,[12] then the reconstructed maternity curtails the mother's ability to act as a female person. Such maternity "has functioned to elide the specificity of women's identities and social functions by equating femininity always and only with reproduction and nurturance."[13]

For sensitive contemporary Chinese women writers, the extolled motherhood is a bondage. They displayed a rebellious consciousness against the mother figure in a number of their stories. This chapter discusses this consciousness manifested in the rewriting of the mother/baby union and the re-description of the mother figure, both to be demonstrated as conducive to women's emancipation.

Rewriting the Mother/Baby Oneness

There has been a wealth of literature singing the praises of the naturally loving mother and the infant's "delicious symbiosis" with her. For example, the Chinese woman writer Bing Xin was well known for such themes.[14] Also Virginia Woolf let Lily Briscoe in *To the Light House* desire a narcissistic returning to the mother figure, as she wishes to mingle with Mrs Ramsy like "waters poured into one jar."[15] In *Black Sun,* Kristeva presents the mother's service to the male infant as so inevitable as to appear natural.[16] Seldom have scholars or writers examined the mother/baby relationship from the point of

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[12]. Ibid., p. 28.

[13]. Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions* (Sydney: Allen & Urwin Pty. Ltd. 1989), p. 119.

[14]. For good reference resources about Bing Xin, see Fan Boqun (ed.), *Bing Xin yanjiu ziliao* (Research materials on Bing Xin). Beijing: Beijing Press, 1984.

[15]. Virginia Woolf, *To the Light House* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1955), p. 79.

[16]. Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*; trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989.

view of the mother. Instead psychoanalysis employs terms such as "infant's pre-oedipal fusion with their mothers. . . the polymorphous bodily pleasures and rhythmic play of mother-infant communication,"[17] and "the blissful isolation of the intra-uterine existence"[18] in emphasizing the importance of the earliest childhood, in which the mother as a speaking/writing subject has largely remained silent on a presumption of maternal love assumed to be true and natural.

The contemporary Chinese women writers, as mothers themselves writing on their lived experiences, have begun to inquire into the matter and exposed it as a myth. Their writings, as an act of "writing the body", disrupted the patriarchal discourse.

In women writer's fiction after the Cultural Revolution, the earliest feminist liberation of women from the conceived maternity can be read in Zhang Xinxin's "On the Same Horizon" (Zai tong yi dipingxian shang, 1981) and Zhang Jie's "The Ark" (Fang zhou, 1982). Both stories were discussed previously as examples of writing on virilization. Part of the heroines' virilization lies in their prioritization of work and self-fulfillment over maternity. Zhang Xinxin's anonymous heroine has an abortion so as to develop her career; Zhang Jie's Liang Qian entrusts her son entirely to her parents' charge, while she is busy with her film directing. In doing so they liberate themselves from the mother's role.

However, it is in Zhang Kangkang's novel *The Invisible Companion* (Yin xin banlü, 1986) that the maternal nature is further rejected. The heroine of the novel Xiaoxiao is an educated youth, who marries another educated youth in

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[17]. Ann Rosalind Jones, "Inscribing Femininity: French Theories of the Feminine" in Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn (eds.), *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 86.

[18]. Quoted from Christine Forula, Modernism's Body: Sex, Culture, and Joyce. P. 206.

the Great Barren North where they are being rusticated.[19] She unexpectedly becomes pregnant. When she gives birth to a baby boy, the narrative goes,

> Nothing was like what is described in stories – the young mother is filled with feeling of happiness at her first sight of the baby. In this room, on the bare earthen bed, she was filled with a strange sense of alienation. She felt life was somewhat absurd to her."[20]

If actual experience is not reflected in the established discourses about maternity, then Jiang Zidan's pregnant heroine in "The Sham Moon" (Jia yueliang) has reasons to "hate" poets, because

> they sing the praises of the fidgeting fetus in the maternal body to deceive women that being a mother is glorious. . . that the cause of creating a life is loftier than anything else. Therefore every pregnant woman expecting labor is eager to let the fetus out so that she can be a mother as soon as possible, regardless if the baby is willing to come into the world.[21]

In light of the quotation, the desire to be a mother is pathetic because it is the result of believing a lie. Moreover, to be a mother is no longer to be unselfish and loving. On the contrary, it is selfish and vain if a woman wants to be a mother just for her own glory. The hypocrisy of the poetic discourses that have deceived women is yet to be further revealed with bodily truth.

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[19]. The term "educated youth" is a translation of the Chinese term *zhishi qingnian*, who were high school students when the Cultural Revolution started in 1966 and many of whom became "Red Guards". In Dec. 1968 Mao, after using them to launch the Cultural Revolution, issued a call to ask them to go to the countryside to "receive re-education from the poor and lower-middle peasants". The Great Barren North is a vast land of wilderness, where a huge number of educated youth were rusticated during the Cultural Revolution.

[20]. Zhang Kangkang, *Yinxin banlü* (The invisible companion) (Beijing: Huayi Press, 1995), p. 179.

[21]. Jiang Zidan, "Jia yueliang" (The sham moon) in Jiang Zidan, *Jiang Zidan xiaoshuo jingcui* (Selected stories by Jiang Zidan) Chengdu: Sichaun Renmin Press, 1998.

In her "Waiting for Dusk" (Deng dai huanghun) Jiang Zidan further dismantles the mother myth.[22] In this story of an experimental style, two female voices alternatively narrate a woman's life. The first-person narrator repetitively recalls her first menstruation as the commencement of a woman's life that focuses on family relations and maternal experience. Juggling with the first-person narrator, the third-person narrator intermittently puts in fragments of an anonymous young woman's disappointing romance. In the third-person narrator's story, her lover is a married man, "spoiled" by his wife and therefore does not do housework. Never mentioning the fact that he is married, her lover enjoys her service until the two have to separate due to different job assignments. The first-person narrator's husband is a man who values his son more than his wife, whom he leaves uncared for after her childbirth labor. Both narrators are informed by consciousness of gender conflicts, but the first-person narrator focuses on excoriating the mother myth. Her mother tells her that only after becoming a mother can a woman be a complete woman, but she contradicts her mother with bodily truth from her own maternal experience.

Thus in the first-person narrator's voice Jiang Zidan rewrites a woman's reproduction process with recourse to the female body. She elaborates bodily details of pregnancy, extends a logic of self through gestation to a "vicious truth" of murderous impulse on the part of the mother.[23] The story rejects mothering as a natural process for women, describing pregnancy as a dreadful illness of the female body.

As the narrative starts, the first-person female narrator, feeling sick, goes to see a doctor for her discomfort only to be told that she is not sick but

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[22]. Jiang Zidan, "Dengdai huanghun" (Waiting for dusk) in Jiang Zidan, *Jiang Zidan xiaoshuo jingcui* (Selected stories by Jiang Zidan).

pregnant. The subsequent realist description of the ill symptoms of pregnancy presents the gestation phase as a period of unusual suffering and torture. Apart from her swollen feet and misshaped body, the most agonizing aspect is vomiting in the early stage of her pregnancy. The narrator throws up almost everything she eats, and she is always in such a state of exhaustion that she has to be confined to bed. To protect her pregnancy, her mother and husband treat her like a delicate patient. She is forbidden to watch any sad or violent TV programs or read any news of that nature.

Yet she has no desire to be "a mother who has power over and obligation to another life". Opposing the traditional filial code that regards being born as a great favor for which a child owes lifelong filial duty to the mother, the narrator considers it an imposition, for which she should by no means be grateful. She cannot see any point of having a child in light of her tense relationship with her own mother, who is a doctor of gynecology. When she is unhappy with her mother, she often wonders to herself: "Did she bring me to this world only to create more chances to make herself angry ? Or to have one more object on which she could release her feelings, whatever they are? She gave me life, therefore she assumes that she has the right to despise me, ridicule me, and interfere with everything in my life." Her critical consciousness of her mother makes her unwilling to be a mother herself.

Her disgust of the maternal role and the physical torture of pregnancy gives rise to a secret wish to vomit the fetus out. Every time after vomiting she insists on examining her vomit in the spittoon, hoping to find "hairs, nails or other fragments of the fetus". The early oneness of the mother and child, said to

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[23]. Experimenting with new ways of writing, Jiang Zidang talked about her attention to details to develop an "absurd logic", behind which there is "vicious truth". See Jiang Zidan, *Jiang Zidan xiaoshuo jingcui* (Selected stories by Jiang Zidan), p. 350.

be unconsciously sought after by the narcissistic avant-garde artist,[24] is by no means a blissful symbiosis here, but a ruthless life and death struggle. As the narrator confesses:

> I became thinner and thinner rapidly. I knew the fetus usurped my womb and was ruthlessly sucking my blood and eating my flesh and tendons. It was getting stronger day by day while I was becoming weaker and more emaciated. I could do nothing about it. My only consolation came from the part of my belly which was still flat. Sometimes I felt the fetus stopped its plundering and went into a slumber. On these occasions I wished my belly muscle were stronger so as to tie up the sleeping fetus and stifle it.[25]

To the pregnant mother, the fetus is a monster eating away her body; her only way to protect her body is to get rid of the fetus. The mother's murderous impulse sounds natural and justified in the description. As an American physician comments: "The pregnant state does not engender in all women the rapturous joy traditionally associated with this condition; indeed, there are some who view their future with a sour and a jaundiced eye."[26]

Susan Rubin Suleiman observes that "Melanie Klein speaks with great sympathy and understanding about the murderous impulse that every child feels towards its beloved mother; she does not speak about the murderous

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[24]. As Kristeva points out in "Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini," some visual artists have displayed mothers as "graspable, masterable objects" who are always within reach. Bellini instead presented maternal space as "fascinating and puzzling" and depicted motherhood as the site of an unrepresentable jouissance. See Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language*; ed. Leon S. Roudiez; trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), pp. 243-247. Also Christine Froula points out, "in Joyce as well as in Freud . . . narcissistic states entail a return to earliest childhood, a regression to the originary mother/child union." See Christine Froula, *Modernism's Body: Sex, Culture, and Joyce* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 206.

[25]. Jiang Zidan, "Dengdai huanghun" (Waiting for dusk) in *Jiang Zidan xiaoshuo jingcui* (Selected stories by Jiang Zidan), p. 29.

[26]. Sally Taylor Lieberman, *The Mother & Narrative Politics in Modern China*, p. 151.

impulse that a mother may feel towards her beloved child."[27] Lieberman quoted this observation by Suleiman to comment on the mother in Lin Shuhua's story "Xiao Liu" (Little Liu, 1929): "in her failure to get mad at her son's greed and arrogance – we feel the terrible loss of self that the suppression of the mother's perspective implies."[28] In contrast, the self in Jiang Zidan's story comes back to the maternal figure through a distinctively murderous impulse towards the fetus. Moreover, in a drastic attempt to protect the self, the murderous impulse develops into an act of murder in the case of the narrator's female friend.

In this murder case, the logic of self-preservation is brought to the extent that the self-erasing maternity becomes a chronical suicide for women. Therefore, implicitly, a woman may not only have murderous impulse towards her children but may actually kill them in order to avoid self-erasure. The narrator reiterates the fleetingness of female life as a journey to death, starting from menstruation, followed by pregnancy, child-rearing, and eventually death. This female life cycle is not much different from that of animals. And the omission of maternity from the journey is just to cut it shorter by avoiding a meaningless period of travelling. Moreover, if the mother is a beautiful woman with a hectic working schedule, then she would have greater reason to do so, as motherhood on top of exhausting work will spoil her physical beauty.

Her friend Su Mi is such a beautiful woman that when she gets married the narrator, then a teenager, feels unhappy at the thought that Su Mi's beautiful body is going to be possessed and ravaged by a man. Su Mi works as

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[27]. Quoted from Sally Taylor Lieberman, *The Mother & Narrative Politics in Modern China* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1998), p. 145. It is originally from Susan Rubin Suleiman, "Writing and Motherhood" in Shirly Nelson Garner et al. (eds.), *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 352-377.

[28]. Ibid., p. 145.

a nurse and is often exhausted. As she enters her middle age, when a woman needs to take greater care to maintain her beauty, she gives birth to twin babies, making her tiring life even more tiring. Thus, implicitly, Su Mi has reason to escape her maternity, as she, being a beautiful woman, would not want to see her beauty decay in the toil of mothering on top of exhausting herself as a nurse at the hospital. Su Mi kills her two babies and is consequently sentenced to death. In this way she "shortens her life journey" by avoiding disfiguring herself in maternity. From a purely aesthetic view, her death is good. As the narrator says, "I congratulate her that she has departed in a perfect state. Since Heaven and Earth endowed her with perfect beauty, she should not live in a depraved way." Su Mi's death avoids the self-erasing maternity, but the ethical problem of murder seems to be untouched. Does the writer approve killing the innocent? People believe that Su Mi is insane, because she writes a note to her husband, saying that she is going to meet her babies in eternity. The narrator, however, insists that Su Mi is not insane, suggesting that the murder of the sons should be seen in another light.

One thing noticeable in the texts discussed above is that the babies are all male. The male sex is not just a coincidence but should be seen as crucial not only to the refutation of the "blissful mother/son symbiosis", but also to the textual subversion of patriarchy. Despite her previous abhorrence to the fetus that turns out to be her son, near the end of "Waiting for Dusk", the narrator says:

> Our erstwhile struggle has been sealed, secretly stored, and guarded by both of us. It has become a private secret never to be let out. He still lords over my life and regulates my life according to the norm he considers as good. I prove myself a good mother by showing my love to

> him every day. Enchanted by the fantasy of mother/son love . . . . I have forgotten my essential opposition to him.[29]

The mother's "essential opposition" to the son in Jiang Zidan's texts then, at a symbolic level, is women's essential opposition to patriarchy. At this level, the word "son" in the quoted passage represents the patriarchal values and the symbolic father. In this light the murder of the sons amounts to a patricide, a gesture of refusal to carry out the patriarchal line. Informed by such female consciousness, the narrative does not bring up any moral condemnation of the murder.

The female consciousness of the "essential opposition" also comes out clearly in the narrator's occasional fit of amnesia, times at which she "forgets the meaning of 'son', suspects his history, and cannot remember who he is, where he comes from". This "forgetting" is, paradoxically, an act of remembering the "essential opposition". Because of the remembering, every time when her son calls her "Mum" she feels it is an "extremely vicious hint". She would rather that he call her by her name or not address her by any epithet, because the very word "Mum" reminds her that he is "flesh and bones from [her] own body".[30] The narrative thus evokes again the initial, primary mother/son struggle. The epithet "mum" not only hints at her surrender but also demands her to behave like a mother according to the established norm. Since the mother/son relationship is depicted in a language hinting at the conflicting values of the two gendered sexes, the text points to a female collective dilemma: while women consciously or unconsciously rebel against

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[29]. Jiang Zidan, "Dengdai huanghun" (Waiting for dusk) in *Jiang Zidan xiaoshuo jingcui* (Selected stories by Jiang Zidan), p. 58.

[30]. Ibid., p. 26.

patriarchal ideology they are at the same time perpetrators of patriarchal society in procreation and in forgetting the "essential opposition".

The Anti-Mother Narrative

The mother who has forgotten her essential opposition to patriarchy and has identified with the latter is the so-called "patriarchal mother". The patriarchal mother becomes another target in women writers' texts, which constitutes another kind of resistance to the idealization of the mother. The mothers in this narrative range from the revolutionary to the traditional as victims and victimizers.

In the context of China's socialist revolution, the heroine Mother Han in Fang Fang's "One Singing Three Sighings" (Yi chang san tan) reaps momentary glory but endless sorrow.[31] In the story Mother Han encourages all her children to answer the CCP's call and packs them off to settle down in either frontiers or remote mountainous areas. As a reward, she is given the "glory" of a "revolutionary mother" but her children lose what better future they may have. Mother Han is thus shown as vain and gullible if not entirely selfish. In Zhu Lin's "The Festival Graves" the mother is also a cadre, who takes "the lead in implementing Party policy and never invites the disapproval from her superiors."[32] Thus she forces her stepdaughter into a third-trimester abortion at the risk of the latter's life. If these stories show that there is no such a thing as inherent "mother nature" in the "revolutionary" mother, other stories set the mother figure in a more traditional light to

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[31]. See Fang Fang, *Fang Fang xiaoshuo jingcui* (Selected stories by Fang Fang) Chengdu: Sichuan Renmin Press, 1998.

[32]. Zhu Lin, *Snake's Pillow*, ed. Howard Goldblatt; trans. Richard King (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), p. 105.

expose "mother nature" as expressions of a mother's internalized patriarchal ideology.

The mother in Jiang Yun's "The Plot at Sunset" (Luori qingjie) is such a representative of the symbolic father.[33] The mother values her son more than her daughter, and blames her daughter for her son's accidental death in the fight of the Cultural Revolution. She makes herself a living reminder of the bereavement to torture her daughter. As a schoolteacher, the mother exercises strict maternal authority on the daughter and demands her absolute filial piety, which eventually erases all possibility of happiness in the latter's life. Significantly, the daughter becomes a high school teacher of Chinese Grammar – the law of the Chinese language. Chen Xiaoming reads her linguistic specialty as a metaphor, which implicitly points to the patriarchal law represented by the mother, who victimizes the daughter who, in turn, transmits it down to the next generation.[34] However, the juxtaposition of another young woman in the story, who does not have such a patriarchal mother, therefore, lives a happy life with her husband, points to a liberating alternative in default of the patriarchal mother. Enhanced by such contrast, the extremely harsh mother image is conjured up as a reminder of the patriarchal specter still lurking among women themselves.

The mother as a castrated perpetrator of patriarchy is further castigated in Xu Kun's novella "Nüwa". The very title of the story "Nüwa" highlights maternity. Nüwa is the Chinese goddess who made the first human beings. In one legend she made the first human beings out of clay and repaired the leaking sky with melt stones; in another legend she had a human

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[33]. Jiang Yun, "luoro qingjie" (Plot at sunset) in Chen Xiaoming (ed.), *Zhongguo Nüxing xiaoshuo jingxuan* (Selected stories by Chinese female writers).

[34]. Chen Xiaoming (ed.), *Zhongguo Nüxing xiaoshuo jingxuan* (Selected stories by Chinese female writers), p. 438.

head and body but a snake's tail and she begot the first human beings as the wife of her brother. Like the goddess, fertility and incest characterize the female protagonist Yuer's life. These two instinctual characteristics set Yuer in a modality of time, which Julia Kristeva named "women's time".[35] This modality concerns responses to the problems of "reproduction, survival of species, life and death, the body, sex, and symbol." The modality of women's time is "a specific measure that retains repetition and eternity through cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature".[36] Embedded in this modality of time, Yuer's life centers on survival and reproduction amidst privation and misogynistic violence.

The early part of the novella introduces Yuer's "castration", to borrow from Freud. A child bride, Yuer is bought into the Yu's house as a maid of the family, a farm laborer, and a tool of procreation. She is chosen for her healthy body, which promises fertility, and for her unbound feet that ensures good labor power. Like "a little animal" struggling against its cage, Yuer rebels and twice attempts to escape at the risk of her life, but is finally tamed and domesticated by her ruthless mother-in-law, who is the virtual head of the family. She makes it her responsibility to train and supervise Yuer in serving the family with ruthless beatings. When she finds Yuer pregnant (from seduction by her husband), she beats her half to death and then arranges a formal wedding between Yuer and her son. She forces her son to go to Yuer's bed and helps him rape Yuer by drugging the latter. As Yuer toils and struggles, she gives birth to ten children, has sexual relations with four males: her father-in-law, her husband, the family farmhand and her idiot son sired

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[35]. Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time" in Warhol, R. R. & Herdal, D. P. (ed.), *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1996).

[36]. Ibid., p. 445.

by her father-in-law. Apart from her liaison with the farmhand, the other three involve rape. Yuer's maternal body is the pleasure object of men and ravaged by them. The ravaging which makes her a mother of ten children is an important part of "castration". As one child after another comes into her life, her position in the family changes from that of slave, to that of mother, and finally to that of mother-in-law. Despite the fact that she hates her mother-in-law intensely at her young age, she eventually becomes a copy of the latter.

Yuer's fertility and maternity contribute to the perpetration of a patriarchal system and, therefore, is nothing to be acclaimed. As a mother who has never desired, she interferes with her children's marriages, forces her son to spend time with her so that he cannot be together with his wife, reports on her son-in-law so as to get her married daughter back to her side, demands her daughter-in-law to attend on her in the same manner she used to attend on her mother-in-law, and finally drives the couple away. As a country woman, she takes it for granted that her daughters are not as valuable as her sons, therefore, helping her in housework is more important than their studies. In spite of her sufferings as a woman, Yuer becomes a patriarchal mother, whose image forgoes any maternal idealization.

The maternal idealization is a patriarchal trick. As Julia Kristeva writes in *About Chinese Women*,

> In a symbolic productive/reproductive economy centered on the Paternal Word (the phallus, if you like), one can make a woman believe that she is (the phallus, if you like), even if she does not have it (the serpent - the penis): Doesn't she have a child? In this way, social

harmony is preserved: the structure functions, produces and reproduces."[37]

Looking at the bodily tortures Yuer has gone through, one would see emerging from the woman's pains is "the castrated mother who represents the symbolic father". The mother's love of her son expresses her worship of the penis/phallus, to which her repressed libido is directed. This maternal worship guides the child to its position of a speaking subject within the symbolic world.

This maternal worship of the penis/phallus is significantly conveyed through a familiar folk scene, in which Yuer's mother-in-law and Yuer are playing with Yuer's grandson, who is just old enough to speak a few sentences.

> "Tell me, my grandson, whose words you obey most?"
>
> "Grandma's."
>
> "To whom will you give your money when you grow up and have earned money?"
>
> "Grandma."
>
> "Who else then?"
>
> "Great Grandma."
>
> "Good boy! Come on, let your grandma have a taste of your little bird!"
>
> The boy touched his penis with his little hand, and then stretched the hand to the two women to hear them make a sound between their gums as a show that they had eaten the delicious thing, whereupon the three of them opened their toothless mouths and smiled happily.[38]

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[37] Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, trans. Anita Barrows (London: Scribner, 1977), p. 22.

[38] Xu Kun, *Nüwa* (Zhengzhou: Hebei Jiaoyu Press, 1995), pp. 107-108.

In a crude way, the passage shows that the mothers (now grandmothers and great grandmothers) raise children consciously for their own benefit, but unconsciously they perpetrate the patriarchal order. The altruistic love of Mother Nature is again evinced non-existent.

The spectrum encompassing stories of the "mother genre" includes "mother-hating" themes, directed at making a parody of the patriarchal mother image. The short story "Soap Bubbles on Foul Waters" (Wushui shang de feizaopao) by Can Xue epitomizes the "mother-hating" subject matter with an impenitently cruel stroke.[39]

The story opens with the statement "My mother disintegrated into a wooden basin of soapy water", followed by an indistinct impartation of the narrators murder confession. The narrator is a middle-aged son living with his elderly mother, who is repetitively emphasized as "moaning, nose-running, drooling and filthy". Appearances aside, a "mother tyrant" image evolves. As the narrator/son says: "Her moaning, nose running and drooling is followed by cursing me as 'an ungrateful vindictive son, capable of appalling treatment of his own mother', and finishes the tantrum with whole-hearted howling ".

The mother controls her son through tantrums with the expectation that the son should be duteous and subservient under her; after all, she is the *mother*. The calculated controlling of her son is compounded by guilt-trips in which she yells, "I knew it, You've been against me the whole time! You put the spittoon on the doorstep just to trip me over...Ooh, Lord!" When the son cautions her not to sleep in the kitchen because of the danger of gas poisoning, she pats his shoulder and says, "What a nice son!" which is

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[39]. Can Xue, "Wushui shang de feizaopao" (Soap bubbles on foul waters) in Li Duo & Huang Ziping (eds.), *Zhongguo xiaoshuo* (Chinese fiction). Hong Kong: Sanlian Shudian, 1985.

followed by "That's what you would like, isn't it? That's what you dream of every night. I know it all. Just you be patient, maybe your waiting won't be in vain!"

The mother/son opposition portrays the mother in an extremely negative fashion. Here the mother is a desperate woman clinging onto her son whom she has "spiritually" already lost. In this story the mother's overwhelming dictatorship contrasts sharply with main stream literature in which mothers are "gentle, loving and self-sacrificing". The word *mother* is redefined in this text as a warping vicious force, whose death in a black soapy basin projects the rebellious psyche of a new generation of women.

The deconstruction of the established mother image that restrains women, it seems, also destroys the last unselfish love in the cultural warehouse of emotions and sentiments. In a world where self-interest reigns, should we not keep a myth that may be conducive to better human relations based on unselfish love? Yet if we should, its effect on women would contradict our aimed dream of a future world, where everyone, not just men, could better develop herself or himself. This is a dilemma in deconstructing the mother myth, which is at once literary, moral, personal, and social.

Conclusion: A Negative Textual Stance

In an essay written after reading an anthology of contemporary women writers' works, Zhang Kangkang writes: "Women writing on women create works from which readers can see contemporary women's lives as well as the women writers themselves from their representation of contemporary women's lives."[40] The stories discussed in this part, with heroines ranging from Zhang Xinxin's and Zhang Jie's virilized women, who strive for self-fulfillment and social ideals, to Xu Kun's Yuer, who initially rebels against the patriarchal tyrant of her mother-in-law but gradually reconciles and identifies with her, represent dilemmas in which contemporary Chinese women find themselves in: the discomfort of the inevitable change of femininity, the double burden, and the imposition of the Mother Nature.

None of the dilemmas have become out-dated yet. The resentment of the "virilized" women characters is a protest against a society which "virilizes" women but at the same time demands them to remain "feminine". Even though the "socialist new women" are no longer "socialist", the old dilemma still exists, obstructing those women who strive for self-fulfillment. For the heroines who struggle between career and family, there seems to be no way out, as Shen Rong's representation shows, except for collapse and death. The death or collapse of the heroine conveys a negative stance of the writing consciousness. The myth of motherhood, which has cast a long shadow over women's dilemma between career and family, has become a target of demystification in women writer's fiction. The negation of the constructed motherhood is a radical novelty in Chinese women's fiction. Yet this

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[40]. Zhang Kangkang, "Ni dui mingyun shuo 'Bu!' " (Say "No!" to fate) in *Ni dui mingyun shuo "Bu!"* (Shanghai: Zhishi Press, 1995), p. 257.

symbolical disruption may well be ethically problematic and hence a dilemma for women.

If the dilemmas conjoin to besiege Chinese women, the female consciousness copes with the situation with an ironic humor. As the young mother in Jiang Zidan's story says that she has consigned her memory of the "essential opposition" to oblivion, a strong sense of self-irony seeps through. Apparently, the female consciousness of women's ironic situation ironizes its own textual projection, because it has to set its heroine to become reconciled with the conventional mother norm. Yet, in this ironizing a seemingly conformative but actually negative female stance arises. For, as the young mother says she has forgotten the "essential opposition" and has proved herself a "good mother", she is actually enhancing the memory and showing that she is not what she says she is. The gesture of reconciliation is therefore an irony, whose true meaning is "No".

Part Three

Female Consciousness: the Detail

Experimental fiction appeared in China towards the middle of the 1980s. The so-called avant-garde writers were heralded by a woman writer called Can Xue. Almost at the same time, another woman writer Liu Sola attracted critical attention with what was called "modernist" works. In 1987, the woman writer Fang Fang published the first representative work of "new realism" in China. The fashionable western names of literary schools, however, are not the reasons for which I choose the writers for discussion. What draws my attention to their works is their peculiar representation of details. If modernity spoke out first in a woman in both the west and the east,[1] it was to be enounced again in feminine details – details of otherness in contemporary Chinese fiction.[2] Such details of otherness include all that which used to be cancelled out from writing, or had never entered texts.

The contemporary textual presence of such details is a continuation of a female literary tradition advocated by Zhang Ailing as discussed in the

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[1]. Sally Taylor Lieberman, *The Mother & Narrative Politics in Modern China*, p. 28.

[2]. For an analysis of feminine details, see my "Introduction", especially the section "Woman and Details: Desublimating the Grand Narrative".

"Introduction" of the thesis. However, if women writers have been engaged with details already, the particularly styled textual presence of such details to be discussed in this part further reinforces an aesthetics, "subjecting this old category to a gradual torsion which will alienate it from its regressive, idealist background and bring it closer to the body, to the *drift*".[3] Thus, if sublimation was a mainstream literary phenomenon in China, the feminine details de-sublimate and produce the possibility for what Derrida called "revelatory ecstasy".[4]

While a female consciousness rooted in women's lived experience tends to focus on details irrelevant or negative to the excellence of any grand idea, the narrative style of such details varies. In this part I shall examine how meaning manifests in the details of Can Xue's apparently incoherent narrative, and how Liu Sola's fragmentary discourse makes sense of the self. The last chapter discusses Fang Fang's parodic writing, which re-describes aspects of reality with revelatory details and, by portraying ironic and playful female intellectuals, demonstrates that the highest consciousness of the self is the consciousness of the other. As a cultural and political phenomenon, the feminine details may not necessarily have a heroine at the center. Thus, different from the previous parts of my thesis, the texts chosen in this part may not be woman-centered.

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[3]. Quoted from Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail* (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd, 1987), p.79.

[4]. Ibid.

Chapter Seven

Dream Language

Can Xue published her first short story " Soap Bubbles on Foul Water" (Wushui shang de feizaopao) in 1985 (which I discussed in Chapter Six). The unconventional style and the devastating content of the story attracted immediate attention. After "The Yellow Earth Street" (Huang ni jie) came to print in 1986, Can Xue was recognized as the pioneer of the experimental literature. In his preface to *An Anthology of Selected Chinese Avant-garde Works,* the Chinese literary critic Chen Xiaoming writes:

> Talking about the "avant-garde" or the "new wave", one cannot avoid Can Xue, although her unique temperament makes it hard to attribute her works to this specific literary trend. . . . her cold and eccentric feeling, thoroughly detailed description of female psychology, her fantastic mode in handling violence, as well as a narrative method that deliberately confuses fantasy and reality, had no doubt seriously influenced the "avant-garde" writers who emerged a little later.[5]

However, if we agree with Yu Luojin that the Chinese modernist (including the avant-garde) writers are those who "play with controversiality and toy with modernism . . . have lost their integrity . . . and are no longer capable of

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[5]. Chen Xiaoming, "Xu" (Preface) to Chen Xiaoming (ed.), *Zhongguo Xianfeng xiaoshou jingxuan* (An Anthology of Selected Chinese avant-garde works) (Lanzhou: Gansu Renmin Press, 1994), p. 5.

confronting the real issues,"[6] then Can Xue's works cannot be identified as avant-garde, because they are deeply concerned with reality. Nevertheless, in her works there are not even the slightest traces of any realism - no typical characters in typical circumstances, no climax, no apparent spot organization, no sense of an orientated historical development. Paradoxically, however, there is no lack of true-to-life detailed descriptions of day-to-day happenings. Yet all such descriptions are just fragmentary representations of a reality which, together with fantastic images, constitute Can Xue's fictional world of dreams and nightmares. This is the imaginary world Can Xue opens by way of a "secret window"; as she says: "Art is to dig out the conscious and the unconscious, to construct dreams with a living, free language by way of extraordinary condensation and displacement".[7]

Can Xue's language is thus shaped in a typically fluid mode, which cancels out the boundary between dream and reality. Incoherence is thus inevitable and, moreover, necessary, because a dream world is not ordered. The extreme fluidity and incoherence present unusual difficulties for those who try to make sense of her texts, so they attributed Can Xue's language to "dream talk", mere symptoms of the unconscious. For example, Jon Solomn, reading Can Xue's "Skylight", interpreted the word "grapes" as "genitals" and construed "the mother's head, stripped of hair and covered in blood" as "castrated penis".[8] Such interpretation is more like a "dream talk" in itself and, typical of dreaming, the interpretation cannot find any supporting evidence in the text. Actually, Can

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[6]. John Minford, "Introduction" to Yu Luojin, *A Chinese Winter's Tale*; trans.Rachel May and Zhu Zhiyu (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1986), p. x.

[7]. Can Xue, *Tiantang li de duihua* (Dialogues in the paradise) (Beijing: Zuojia Press, 1988), p. 15.

[8]. Jon Solomn, "Taking the Tiger Mountain: Can Xue's Resistance and Cultural Critique" in Barlow Tani. E (ed.), *Gender Politics in Modern China* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), pp. 242-243.

Xue's writing is conscious, or deliberate dreaming/imagination. As we shall see, Can Xue's earlier fiction all have themes, and the themes are highly political – in fact so politically sensitive that it is better for her to use a dream language. In those texts, her dream language strongly evidences a conscious mind engaged with reality. As Bei Dao, a Chinese oppositional poet, speaks the truth of creative writing: "Poetry is a kind of order in chaos: if this order is not there, the poetry does not exist either. . . poetry is not speaking in your sleep, or at least should not be."[9]

In the first section of the chapter I shall discuss her presentation of details, mainly in "Yellow Earth Street", to demonstrate how a gross dystopia comes out of her apparently incoherent linguistic fragments. The discussion will involve her use of a scatological vocabulary, her way to communicate alienation in human relationship and psychology. In the second section I shall discuss her novel *Breaking-Out Performance* (Tuwei biaoyian), and I will focus more on the radical feminist consciousness that informs the text. In Can Xue's cryptic language labyrinth, as we shall see, the detail is the bridge of meaning between a dream world and the reader.

A Gross Dystopia

The chaotic, dreamy world of Can's fiction frequently unfolds around phallocentric images: the ox and his behind ("Ox" [Gongniu]), the scorching sun ("The Yellow Earth Street" [Huangni jie]), the father with wolf's eyes ("The Little Hut on the Hill" [Shanshang de xiaowu]), and the slashing wind, ice and snow storm that cause a profound sense of isolation in the narrator. Moreover, the

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[9] . Bei Dao, "Secrecy and Truth" in Søren Clausen, Roy Starrs and Anne Wedell-Wedellsborg (eds),*Culture Encounters: China, Japan, and the West* (Aarhus C. Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 1995), p. 236.

phallocentric images are omnipresent in a nightmarish world which, with names such as Yellow Earth Street or Five Scent Street, alludes to a general situation of human existence in China. Lu Xun once compared China to an iron house, and now the familiar image resurfaces in Can Xue's fictional world. "Ah, Yellow Earth Street," she writes,

> I have some dreams, some dear, sorrowful, and incoherent dreams! In those dreams there are invariably the same strange iron door and the same yellow, dirty small sun. On the iron door there is inexplicably a row of iron fangs, and the small sun is forever up on a corner of the gray sky, issuing metallic deadly light.[10]

The yellow, dirty, small sun 'issuing metallic deadly light' is provocatively challenging to the "reddest and reddest sun in our hearts" in the daily eulogies of Mao during the Cultural Revolution. When Can Xue wrote the story, Mao was still officially praised as a "great leader", and to make such innuendo certainly needs courage.

Can Xue's anxiety over the true nature of her dreams is even more obvious when she writes:

> Ah, Yellow Earth Street . . . perhaps you exist only in my dream? Perhaps you are a mere shadow, giving away gentle sorrows?[11]

With this sober creative consciousness, Can Xue let human excrement strew the narrative of "The Yellow Earth Street" as an antidote to utopianism. Out of one hundred and seventy-five pages of the story, forty-five pages contain words such as "stools", "farting", "making a bowl movement in the toilet", "urine", and

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[10]. Can Xue, *Tiantang li de duihua* (Dialogues in the paradise), p. 9.

[11]. Ibid.

"chamber pots" full of human excretions. The unusually frequent mentioning of the matter, while stressing the body as an antidote to the utopian, also forms, together with a plethora of revolting images such as dead dogs, "rain of dead fish", "rubbish piles", and "fly-eating woman", an ugly picture of dystopia.

In this dystopia, chaos is the only consistency; logic, lucidity, and intelligibility are entirely absent. Therefore, one finds illogical, incoherent, and discrete descriptions throughout her book. For example, at one stage in "The Yellow Earth Street" the narrative shifts to Wang the factory head, who sits by the door of his home to watch the sparrows on top of the thatched roof of the opposite hut. His thoughts flow from sparrows to dogs and fleas, but then the narrative takes an abrupt turn to the political in an absurdist fashion:

> Last night the district head came to knock at his door and called him over to his place. The head wanted him to declare his attitude: is the case of Wang the Smallpox a case of persecution? He remembered that he had talked a lot, but all in all his words could only be described as evasive. Why was he evasive? He did not know - perhaps because he could not answer. "Is Wang the Small-Pox' a real man?" the district head had asked him by way of a surprise attack. Scared, he felt a cold spell suddenly coming down his spine. He didn't answer, but vaguely talked about such things as the mysterious connection of Wang Ziguang and Yellow Earth Street, forebodings of dreams, and exits of secret traps, finally he proposed: "We should prevent disorder on the ideological level." The district head wasn't pleased at all. He took off his socks and scratched between his toes restlessly. Afterwards he took out a mortar and began grinding medical powder which, he said, was to be smeared on eyes. . . [12]

[12]. Ibid., p. 104.

There are also ubiquitous exchanges of unrelated words engaging impossible communications, such as the one which occurs on the morning right after the narrated event in the above passage:

> "Well, how do you think about it?" the district head came. He was very thin, deprived of manner, and his clothes were just a gunny-bag, wrapping him inside.
>
> "How about your eyes? Let me have a look! Alas, it is all puss, rotten through. You cannot get rid of such eye disease!"
>
> "I feel there is a resistant mood among the masses."
>
> "Have you heard about chicken paws growing on women's feet? It has been drizzling for two days, even quilts have become slippery. My old woman said a big fire is needed to dry the quilts, otherwise something would grow inside."[13]

Lost in such incoherent babblings as the narrative seems, the utterances such as "We should prevent disorder on the ideological level" and " I feel there is a resistant mood among the masses" are actually daily political jargon in China during the Cultural Revolution. The placement of such jargon alongside the most trivial or even disgusting details such as scratching one's toes, swollen gums and puss in the eyes trivializes the official ideology that produced the jargon, and reveal profoundly the discrepancy between real life and a high-sounding utopian discourse to the extent of making the latter totally irrelevant and absurd.

People living in this dystopia, where slogans about class struggle are deliriously and frequently uttered, naturally suffer from morbid anxiety. Generated from this anxiety are voyeurism and agoraphobia. In the story "Old

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[13]. Ibid., p. 105.

Floating Clouds" (Canglao de fuyun) a woman tells her wary husband of her caution against their neighbor:

> I have put a big mirror on the back wall from which we can watch every move of theirs [the neighbors]. It's so convenient. I hate the way they raise the gold fish.[14]

The action is taken because they believe their neighbors are also watching them. In this dystopia everyone is paranoid and, consequently, people resort to agoraphobia for safety. Therefore we see a woman making grimaces "complacently" to frustrated male intruders who cannot get into her place as the door and windows are all fortified. Also, alternatively, they take surprise attack, especially by way of exposing others' privacy, as a deadly weapon. Thus there is a man who practices assaulting a cock and whenever possible, threatens to expose his weaker peer's "private secret" to the public so as to scare the latter half to death although the latter does not have any such secret at all. To keep themselves safe, the inhabitants of the "Yellow Earth Street" behave in such an alert manner as if they are in a war:

> They bolted the doors as soon as they entered their homes. They gave their children a sound smacking if the latter insisted on going out. After the smacking they, still short of breath, would climb up to the attic and peep out stealthily, they would also make some sound to see if there was any response from outside. . . . Although inside the house it was as hot as an oven, they would not open the door to get fresh air. At midnight, an old woman dressed in black would slip out from every household. Stealthily the old women would walk close to the wall of the buildings along the streets. They would stretch their necks, make some noise or

[14]. Ibid., p. 186.

> simply throw a stone into the water, then stealthily they would come home immediately.[15]

Madness is the hallmark of these absurd details, and it is this madness that connects Can Xue's narrative to the reality of China during those incessant political movements, when people were under strict surveillance and everyone was afraid of someone else, as one word of betrayal would end up with the betrayed imprisoned.

Home, however, is not a safe harbor in fiction, just as it is not in reality. The home scene in Can Xue's narrative brings out the hatred and apathy between family members to a typical intensity. The family relationship is so tense that in the story "The Little Hut on the Hill" (Shanshang de xiaowu) the female narrator's mother's smile is "hypocritical", and her father's eye is "a familiar wolf's eye". It dawns upon her that her father has changed into a wolf in the pack of wolves that run around the hut at night, wailing continuously. Even her younger sister, with one eye turned green, stares at her hostilely. Amid such familial atmosphere, love is non-existent. Husband and wife gloat over each other's misfortune. Even though they share one bed, there is a cold strangeness bordering on hostility:

> At night when they were awake yet dreaming, she found his feet stretched too far, which gave her a feeling of strangeness. His icy-cold and joint-protruding foot touched on her pillow, with one toe swollen as a carrot.[16]

The female sense of the cold estrangement is intensified with the intruding male foot. Moreover, if, according to Freud, Oedipus means swollen foot which, in

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[15]. Ibid., p. 44.

[16]. Ibid., p. 29.

turn, means an erect penis,[17] then the carrot-like, swollen toe in the above passage symbolizes a pernicious, aggressive penis (and phallus as well) to the female.

Although the sensitive, female narrator is tortured by fear and isolation, and is extremely scared when a "he" wants to get into her enclosed place, she still seeks hope in life. She utters a monologue to an absent person, a "you" who, as an absent addressee whose power to talk back is completely in the control of the narrator, indulges the narrator in whatever she wants to speak about. This monologue then can be read as one part of the self addressing the other part of the self, and as such is a convenient medium to accommodate self-splitting - the "I" the less rational, inner self bordering the unconscious and the "you" the conscious, outer self. The "I" that is in danger of being silenced is also allured by silence. As the female voice goes on: "perhaps one day I would become a fish . . . . then your heart would be torn and your head would be as dizzy as if it were a windmill." In spite of all her timidity and fear she, in the darkness, looks for a flower symbolically called "night fragrance"- she searches for it "in the room", that is, in the inner heart, and the "you" will look for it outside, in the external world.[18]

To search for this night fragrance, however, is by no means to arrive at inner perfection or to find a beautiful world by way of transcending reality. It is, for Can Xue, to set off on a critique of a traditional, collective culture, within which the individual self suffers from repression and oppression. With feminist consciousness and profound awareness of history, Can Xue proceeds this critique by way of meeting the mad woman, whom may be briefly summed up

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[17]. William McGuire (ed.), *The Freud /Jung Letters* (Penguin Books, 1991), p.166.

[18]. Can Xue, "Tian chuang" (Skylight) in *Tiantang li de duihua* (Dialogues in the paradise), p. 339.

from Linda Schierse Leonard's *Meeting the Mad Woman* as a powerful psychological and emotional energy for creative imagination.[19]

Breaking-Out Performance

Can Xue's novel *Breaking-Out Performance*[20] centers on the encounter between such a mad woman and the traditional phallocentric culture of China. The novel is a black comedy which, by way of "extraordinary condensation and displacement", reveals women's as well as men's existential predicaments in a political culture braced by patriarchal tradition. This mad woman finds an incarnation in Ms X who lives an "extraordinary" life in the Five-scent Street and refuses to be assimilated by the street community. The Five-scent Street community is obviously presented as an epitome of Chinese society, because, as the writer writes, the story "has no beginning nor end, it is history itself; the story may stop when the earth clashes with the sun, yet even so it may begin on another planet."[21]

Ms X and her husband make a living by running a broad-bean popping shop, an occupation, which, in the eyes of the Five-scent Street inhabitants, is an indication of their shameful degradation as they are said to have been government cadres in previous years. The couple's banishment from the government signifies disobedience and nonconformity. Nothing else about Ms X is certain in the novel except that she is tirelessly seeking an extraordinary pleasure which, in all its non-definability and unconventionality, may be called "*jouissance*", to borrow from Kristeva's vocabulary. This pleasure involves,

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[19]. Linda S. Leonard, *Meeting the Mad Woman: An Inner Challenge for Feminine Spirit.* New York: Bantam Books, 1993.

[20]. Can Xue, *Tuwei biaoyan* (Breaking-out performance). Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Press, 1990.

[21]. See the cover of Can Xue's *Tuwei biaoyan* (Breaking-out performance).

according to Ms X's own words, "dissolving other's sorrow or doing mischief". No one knows exactly what her secret occupation is but everyone believes that it is something pleasurable concerning sex with a man other than her husband. In indulging her own desire, Ms X respects no existing laws, conventions, or tradition. Near the end of the novel she tells the narrator that she "is not a person like the others, but an expression of subjective desire which can only disturb people's minds as it can never be realized."[22]

Implicitly, Ms X is engaged in activities of pleasure. A life of pleasure, "of sexual experimentation" is one of the two options of an aesthetic life in Richard Rorty's understanding of Freud in terms of "aesthetic life" and "ascetic life".[23] Adopting Nietzsche's notion of the "ascetic priest", Rorty stresses its feature of being "pejorative and gendered", and he remarked: "Ascetic priests are often not much fun to be around, and usually are useless if what you are interested in is happiness".[24] In Chinese socialism, people are expected to be against pleasure and to live ascetic lives.[25] In this light, Ms X's engagement in pleasure is highly liberal compared with those in the community.

When the inhabitants of Five-scent Street eventually have to assimilate Ms X in a self-deceiving way, they declare, not completely without truth:

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[22]. Can Xue, *Tuwei biaoyan* (Breaking-out Performance), p. 319.

[23]. Richard Rorty explains "ascetic life" as a search for purity and "aesthetic life" a search for enlargement. He further explains, "The desire to enlarge oneself is to embrace more and more possibilities, to be constantly learning, to give oneself entirely to curiosity, to end by having envisaged all the possibilities of the past and of the future. It was the goal shared by, for example, de Sade, Byron, and Hegel." He then develops the aesthetic life into two options: one being "sexual experimentation and political engagement" offered by Sade and Byron, the other "the enrichment of language" offered by Hegel. See Richard Rorty, "Freud and Moral Reflection" in Richard Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 154.

[24]. Richard Rorty, "Heidegger, Kundera, and Dickens" in Richard Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others*, p. 72.

[25]. A refraction of such ascetic preachment can be seen in the speech by the male protagonist Li Menyu of Shen Rong's "Spring-time forever" discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis.

> We understood the nature of Ms X long ago . . . . The mistake Ms X has made is that she is confused about the concept of time and is blind to today's social order . . . . If only we experiment in the future on what she has been doing so far, we will find that what she has been doing is actually what we have been craving to do, but we do not have the courage to release our instincts and to defy the stereotyped conventions . . . . This is why we have a sense of familiarity and feel the matter concerns our life and death when we consider Ms X's behaviors.[26]

Indeed, what Ms X does is what has been unconsciously desired by the others. In one episode Ms X is being secretly followed to the riverside, a place she often retreats to. She strips herself of all clothes in an attempt to feel some mysterious touch and to have communion with the air. While this "shameless" behavior invokes indignation and invites condemnation, two women who have despised Ms X get so inspired that they decide to put up a nude parade on the street the next day. When the two appear on the street with nothing on their bodies, other women are first shocked and indignant, but ultimately they cannot help but follow suit in rapture. At first men flare up when they see their naked wives, but immediately they realize they can take advantage of other female bodies in this chaotic situation, so eagerly they also participate in the parade. Women here are hinted as close to nature and pleasure but men are hypocritical.

The hypocrisy of the phallocentric culture is further revealed when Ms X one day makes a public speech allegedly on sex. The audience, male and female, are all righteously angered over this immoral topic and yet eager to listen. To their disappointment, the speech is nothing on real sex but incoherent babbling beyond their comprehension. However, the male audience in the front all try to pinch Ms X's body, which arouses the ire of the men at the back as they are in a

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[26]. Can Xue, *Tuwei Biaoyan* (Breaking-out performance), p. 307.

disadvantageous distance to do so. While Ms X is adored by the male inhabitants for her beauty, Mr Q, the man who is supposed to be having a sexual liaison with Ms X, is the center of female admiration for his good looks and alleged sensitivity in understanding women. Thus the gossip about the adultery, which is the major occupation of the street inhabitants, hints at nothing but their own unspeakable desires. The supposed sexual liaison between Ms X and Mr Q, which seems to have extraordinary features such as multicolored eyes in both partners, exists only in the imaginations of the street inhabitants. Therefore the adultery, which is the central topic of the novel, can also be regarded as a displacement, a sign for instinctual desire to break through the existing symbolic system, which Can Xue never ceases to attack.

In attacking the existing symbolic system, Can Xue is poignantly sarcastic towards its phallocentric core. The core incarnates in an elite group of intellectuals who govern the street inhabitants. The group often hold meetings in a dark room to discuss "important" matters such as how to deal with Ms X's abnormal behavior. They presume that the adultery must have taken place but disagree on the location of the adultery. At one meeting the elite intellectuals somehow settle on the place of the adultery as a barn, and then they start to discuss who, Ms X or Mr Q, takes the initiative in making love. The dominant male opinion is represented by Dr A, a man with a Ph.D in philosophy. He opines that there is no doubt it is Mr Q who takes the initiative, because Ms X is a woman. According to him, a woman is biologically determined to be passive. He states that every woman knows that only by making herself more feminine can she get the pleasure she expects to get; men by nature are able to conquer women. In view of the current situation, he moves on to comment on the "sheer lie" that a woman is like a tigress and on the "complaint" that wives are too docile. He points out that these are indications of an unhealthy masochistic male

psyche. Finally Dr A suggests that a campaign to revitalize the masculine essence in the male inhabitants be launched in Five-scent Street to reconsolidate men's leading position in life. The suggestion is sarcastically provocative, given the popular saying of "yin ascending while yang descending" (*yin sheng yang shuai*),which conveyed an urgent sense about a masculinity crisis in China from the 1950s till the early 1990s.[27]

Within this elite group, there are also conflicting ideas. An elite member called Ms B makes a speech with ideas interestingly corresponding with those of Kristeva's.[28] Contrary to the male opinion, Ms B, like Kristeva, affirms the existence of female desire and asserts female initiative. She says:

> . . . if you open your eyes and look around, you will find that almost all conjugal lives are presided over by women. What are men? They are nothing but stones. You have to warm them up in your arms to make them alive - this is the misery of women at night. What I want to say is that men have been destroyed by their careers. This world abounds with vivid women and senile men. Women not only are predominant in sexual life but also determine the direction of social development.[29]

Yet men always neglect their wives' desire. They do not even respect them. They call them by names such as "stumbling stones", "disastrous stars", or "demons", and even complain that their wives have no desires. "The world has played a trick on women", she says, "they pay great attention to men so as to let

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[27]. See Liu Zaifu's "Subjectivity Revisited" in Liu Kang and Xiaobing Tang (eds.), *Politics, ideology, and literary discourse in modern China: theoretical interventions and cultural critique* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993) and Wang Meng's "Xu" (Preface) to the *Red Poppy Series* (of women writers' fiction anthologies). Zhengzhou: Hebei Jiaoyu Press, 1995.

[28]. In *About Chinese Women*, Kristeva presumes Chinese women do not suffer from repression of desire; see *About Chinese Women*, trans. Anita Barrows (London: Scribner, 1977), pp. 46-47.

[29]. Can Xue, *Tuwei biaoyan* (Breaking-out performance) (Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Press, 1990), p. 220.

them have all the sexual pleasures whilst women themselves get nothing". Astutely, she points out that men are in control of public opinions, through which they glorify themselves as heroic masters although they are good for nothing. And she goes on:

> We have acquiesced in this situation since ancient times . . . we let men manipulate the world with their opinions. We are too lazy to think but parrot men so as to live an easier life . . . we are intoxicated when men pretend to eulogize us with words such as "mother" and "goddess" . . . . The reason why men succeed is that they have controlled social opinions. In any society ideology is the most important thing, but we women have never discovered this. We only follow men's orders blindly and blindly we worshipped those stupid men.[30]

Ms B believes that women's slave consciousness is not innate but instilled through public opinions, and that it is high time that women master the "blackboard newspaper" to create new public opinions. But when the situation has become favorable for women, women must not exclude men from pleasure. As for whether Ms X or Mr Q takes the initiative in the barn, Ms B thinks it is certainly Ms X. However, unlike Kristeva who thematizes this allegedly female sexual initiative into a sexual economy based on women's *jouissance* existing in China, Ms B considers this unimportant and thinks it has nothing to do with the consciousness of female independence as something spiritual is lacking. Ms B's ideas are quintessentially feminist and are consequently brushed aside by the male-dominant elite group. Nevertheless, the female inhabitants of Five-scent Street are inspired and decide to take action to make a "blackboard newspaper" of their own. Ironically, by night time they have already abandoned what they planned to do in daytime, and instead, with a guilty conscience, they attend on

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[30]. Ibid., pp. 226-227.

their husbands with greater care. Women's inertia is so embarrassing that the narrator seems to be unable to make any more comment but turn to satirize the "dynamic masculinity".

The so-called "dynamic masculinity" is put up to offset the existence of the mad woman. Since there is no other way to deal with her, the inhabitants of Five-scent Street interpret Ms X's extraordinary behavior as an advanced show of what they can and will do in their future, and without her knowledge they "elect" her as their representative of futurism. In spite of Ms X's total disregard of what they are doing (her mysterious eyes never see human shapes but "rags"), they celebrate their victory in assimilating Ms X by taking "photos of dynamic masculinity" – photos of men in which women are "mere decorations", and Dr A is elected as the "Great Lion", the head of Five-scent Street community. In Chinese culture, the lion symbolizes masculinity. In electing Dr A, who showed himself a misogynist earlier on, the "Great Lion", patriarchy is once again reconfirmed, but only after the street inhabitants have shut Ms X's abnormal existence out of their mind through an interpretation of her occupation as something they want. The "dynamic masculinity" is thus presented as a great satire.

The end of the novel continues what Five-scent Street inhabitants have been doing with Ms X since the beginning of the novel - everyone is curious about and on guard against Ms X. However, all are of the opinion that Ms X is "indescribably wonderful". The "indescribable feeling", as the narrative goes, "varies from person to person", because the mad woman in us is different from person to person.

As an allegory, Can Xue's novel portrays the conflict between the mad woman, our unconforming, instinctual energy, and the patriarchal tradition. Disregarding the traditional way of story telling, she denounces the rotten

aspects of Chinese culture in a diabolically satirical language and an unconventional textual structure. The linguistic characteristics and her feminist position are most striking in her postscript entitled "The Aura of Dynamic Masculinity and the Good Time for Literary Criticism", which was said to be her actual speech at the Shanghai Literary Conference organized in honor of Wang Anyi and Can Xue. The postscript can be regarded as a continuation of the novel in that the writer assumes the identity of a Five-scent Street resident just as the narrator in the novel does. In doing so Can Xue fictionalizes the speaker/addresser into her persona and gains greater convenience and freedom to continue her attack in the novel.

In her speech a character called Old Stupid in the novel is evoked as representative of traditional Chinese culture. While his old age and his occupation of keeping a shop of traditional Chinese medicinal herbs speak of his traditional Chinese heritage which, together with his increasing capacity of having sexual affairs with female inhabitants of Five-scent Street, implies the revival of the patriarchal tradition. His sexual prowess makes him the hero of Five-scent Street. With the double glory of being a remaining ancestor and sexual hero, Old Stupid is regarded as one of the best three literary critics. One of the other two best critics is the speaker/writer's comrade-in-arms, a warrior of a traditional mountain village where each of the eight hundred warriors is mated with a beautiful woman of bound feet. The warriors' propensity for women's bound feet points to the younger heroes' similarity to Old Stupid; yet the name "warrior" indicates they are also new, suggestive of the Chinese communist revolution. The third best critic is a modern theorist who has specialized in the particular art of literary criticism, named as "the art of putting on a stern facial expression" in Can Xue's speech.

The particular warrior was sent down the mountain to study literary theory and has published quite a few books in the area. He recommends the title of the speech/postscript to the writer, but thinks a woman is not qualified to talk about "the art of putting on a stern facial expression", an art which enables one to neglect reality by entering a state "between seeing and unseeing". To seek the modern theorist's guidance in furthering her skill in this art the writer comes to the literary conference.

If Old Stupid represents the traditional patriarchal culture and the theorist represents the modern art of escapism, then the young warrior combines the two in one; As the writer puts it: "the art of putting on a stern facial expression and traditional culture are two comrades-in-arms in the same trench or two sides of the same coin." The postscript is thus a diatribe attacking the patriarchal ideology as well as a criticism of an escapist tendency in contemporary Chinese literature.

To escape reality, the three have filters in their ears. When they hear Ms X's "weird scream", these "three elite members" hear nothing but an "insect's buzzing".

> So smiling at each other, they utter in concert: "Isn't this a good time for literary criticism? Isn't this buzzing proving our superiority?"[31]

The poignant satire points to the retrogressive literary phenomena of the time, including, obviously, texts of root-searching literature and texts of "pure theory" (what the theorist represents). The former in the attempt to get back to the cultural root of Chinese literature often indiscriminately digs out rotten aspects and treats them as treasure; the latter escapes reality by sporting "pure" literature and, in its revolt against the dominant official ideology, it often identifies,

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[31]. Ibid., p. 342.

consciously or unconsciously, with the traditional patriarchal ideology. The "weird scream" represents repressed desire and sufferings of people; the female gender identity of the "weird scream" particularly points to the phallocentric nature of the Chinese cultural world. Indeed, a number of texts of China's experimental literature today, as Lu Tonglin points out, are misogynistic.[32]

Can Xue's mad woman, highly satirical and totally out of tune with the existing society, is a solitary voice, delirious and anti-social. This is partly due to Can Xue's use of an extraordinarily incoherent language which, while greatly enhancing the madness of the mad woman, lets the mad woman remain the mere emanation of a solipsistic psyche. It is impossible for Ms X to communicate with anyone because human beings are mere "rags" in her eyes. Similarly, the impossibility of communication among other characters in Can Xue's writing points to a world where each person talks only to himself/herself. The haunting image of the isolated woman who lurches, so to speak, (if she does not come forward) behind almost all her texts shatters the representational code of the liberated Chinese women. The intertwining of a scatological vocabulary with political jargon powerfully displays the discrepancy between utopia and the body. Moreover, the linguistic solipsism that threads through her texts subverts the utopian interpersonal relationship marked by the term "comrade" and makes its Chinese equivalent *"tongzhi"*, which means people who share the same ideal and the same determination to realize the ideal, sound hollow. All these may establish Can Xue as one of the most radical of all the experimental writers in China.

The poor readability of her texts, however, makes her writing inaccessible to the majority of readers. Even the few sympathetic male professional critics

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[32]. Lu Tonglin, *Misogyny, Cultural Nihilism, and Oppsitional Politics: Contemporary Chinese Experimental Fiction*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.

who tried to comment on her works find the speaking consciousness of her texts "weird" and "insane". If the language of an experimental literature becomes so incoherent that it blocks comprehension and makes reading an arduous task, completely devoid of pleasure even for trained professionals, then its social function is necessarily reduced. Such self-alienation is not desirable if Can Xue wants her radical writings to be meaningful (meaning comes into existence only in reading) and ultimately functional.

But the idea of the social function of literature may already be out-dated for Can Xue. In one of her recent stories published in the 1990s, the female narrator, talking about her way of telling a story, states:

> I do not want to stick to the clues of any event, but I would rather make my brain accommodate a variety of ideas at the same time. After colors have faded away, some directions that can be easily followed would show up. Then I begin to jump, touching the ground with my toes and hopping casually, or dragging my heels along I withdraw by two steps after each forward jumping. Having completed the journey perfunctorily, I feel satisfied with myself because I did not sweat in the procedure.[33]

As far as incoherence is concerned, the above passage sounds like the experimental technique by which Can Xue makes up her stories. However, since her writing style remains unchanged throughout her publications up till now, the experiment is no longer an experiment but follow-up of an old recipe. In the postscript of her recent story collection, Can Xue obviously realized the solipsistic nature of her writings, as she puts: "At this stage, my writings have long become self-addressing. Such kind of writings contain fatal

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[33]. Can Xue, "Lütu zhong de xiao youxi" (Small games on the journey) in *Huihuang de rizi* (The splendid days) (Zhengzhou: Hebei Jiaoyu Press, 1995), p. 339.

contradictions."[34] One of the contradictions is between her rebellious consciousness and her sticking to this no longer experimental technique of incoherent babbling. This babbling emanating from an isolated, whimsical, and often timid or paranoid woman, can be seen ultimately as a refraction of the most feminine quality prescribed and shaped by patriarchal society. In this sense, the female consciousness represented in Can Xue's writing while being radical, is also symptomatic of a pathological society.

[34]. Can Xue, "Houji" (Postscript) in *Huihuang de rizi* (The splendid days), pp. 341-342.

Chapter Eight

The Fragmentation

With her unique expression of a dynamic individuality stripped of hypocrisy and camouflage, Liu Sola's debut into the Chinese literary field in 1985 produced a "shock effect". As a Chinese critic writes:

> When Chinese literature still lingers at a stage where stories were repeatedly told about a conventionally identified social background and when everyone was describing a prescribed life area through some pre-prepared eye-glasses and when everyone buttoned up to the collar in fear of exposing their true features, Liu Sola unheedingly walked into the stuffy literary circle and simply started to write.[1]

What is new about Liu Sola's writing? How does her female gender function in the way she engages herself in literature? How does female consciousness find expression in Liu Sola's fiction? These are the questions I am going to explore in this chapter.

Compared with Can Xue, Liu Sola's writings are more fragmentary than incoherent. Whilst Can Xue is unique in her free use of a dream language to

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[1]. Zhu Wei, "Liu Sola xiaoji" (A little record of Liu Sola) in *Zhongshan*, 2 (1991), p. 155.

reveal a dystopia with a high feminist consciousness, Liu Sola's writings quite often speak directly about her own lived experience, as she said "I know no theory. I just write about what I know."[2] Of the few stories Liu Sola has written the majority are told by a first person female narrator, and in these narratives, there is not much story in the conventional sense at all. The narratives are mostly about personal experiences, memories of friendship, doubts, hesitations, feelings and personal views, which are quite often gender conscious. Thus, Liu Sola's writings, especially her later writings, can be attributed to what Felski summarizes in her *Against Feminist Aesthetics* as self-narrative.[3] Liu Sola's self-narrative is not uniquely her self-experience in the sense it is not shared by anyone else, but represents the rebellious spirit of her generation, a generation one cannot simply categorize by age difference but has to take gender into consideration. Except for her evident gender consciousness, so far Liu Sola's writings are mainly limited within the experience of a young collective who belong to the elite as far as their family background, education, and occupational activities are concerned.[4] In the process of searching for self expression, the generation is rebellious against the sociopolitical restraints, the suffocating traditional culture and all its hypocrisy and ossification. The rebellion, as some critics point out, bears the influence of Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* and J. D Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*, two books Liu Sola was fond of reading. Yet, if Liu Sola's characters share the frustration, black humor, sense of absurdity, and futility of the characters in the western novels, the defiant rebellion of her characters is very different from that of the western youth as presented in the novels, because her

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[2]. Ibid., p.153.

[3]. Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 94.

rebellion is accompanied by a quest for meaning. In her "A Story Too Many" (Duoyu de gushi, 1986) the female narrator relates that her grandmother says one should live according to a measuring rod (moral principle) but her grandmother does not say what material the rod is made from or what size it is.[5] This search for meaning continued throughout Liu Sola's stories up till the early 1990s, and is especially remarkable in her writings of what may be called as "self-narrative" featured by the voice of a female first-person narrator.

The search for meaning in the self-narrative is ultimately a search for the meaning of the (female) self, which undergoes a process correspondent to the following:

> the individual does not arrive at a stabilized state of mind. Rather, he or she develops the capacity for understanding him/herself in this manner and creditably communicating this understanding to others. One does not acquire a state of "true self" but a potential for communicating that such a state is possessed.[6]

The capacity for communicating the female self is often achieved in the process of a woman striving to assert her self, however illusory it may be. Such a process involves a critique of femininity, which is discernible first in her story "You Have No Other Choice" (Ni bie wu xuanze),[7] a story that established her name as a modernist writer in contemporary Chinese literature; and then in her story "Blue

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[4]. For reference to her elite background, see Martha Cheung's Introduction to Liu Sola's *Blue Sky Green Sea and Other Stories*; trans. Martha Cheung (Hong Kong: Research Center for Translation, Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1993), p. ix.

[5]. Liu Sola, "A Story Too Many" in *Blue Sky Green Sea and Other Stories*; trans. Martha Cheung (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1993), p. 110.

[6]. Gergen & Mary M. Gergen, *Refiguring Self and Psychology* (Brookfield: Dartmouth, 1993), p. 220.

[7]. Liu Sola, "Ni bie wu xuanze" (You have no other choice) in her anthology *Hundun Jia Ligeleng* (Chaos and all that) Beijing: Huaqiao Press, 1994.

Sky Green Sea" (lantian lühai),[8] which presents this capacity of self understanding in a painful self-splitting manner; and then in a more self-reflexive form in the novella "In Search of the King of the Singers" (Xun zhao gewang).[9] Eventually, her expression of a female self is conveyed in a multi-layered narrative in her novel *Chaos and All That.* (Hundun jia ligeleng, 1991) This chapter delineates the four stages in Liu Sola's self narrative, I shall demonstrate that Liu Sola's fragmentary narrative contributes to a decentered view of self, wherein the self is an assemblage of accidents and idiosyncratic needs, and the female gender, being one of the accidents, should not stand in the way of a woman's pursuit for a life style of her own.

Hyperbolic Femininity

In 1985 Liu Sola became well-known for her story "You Have No Other Choice". The story attracted so much attention that Wang Meng, a famous writer and a critic himself and then Minister of the Cultural Ministry, found that her story could not be neglected. As he wrote: "The appearance of Liu Sola's story in 1985 is not a fortuitous but an avant-garde phenomenon, for both its content and style show discontentment and brave exploration. We cannot help but learn to have a dialogue with the characters in her story, try to understand them and pay more attention to them."[10] This "them" however, is male.

In "Choice", a group of music students, under two music professors who represent respectively the conservative tradition and the modernist trend, struggle between following the established academic routine and finding their

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[8]. The story is collected in Liu Sola's anthology *Green Sky Green Sea and Other Stories.*

[9]. Ibid.

[10]. Liu Beixian, "Liu Sola pingzhuan "(A commentary biography of Liu Sola), in Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Yuan (ed.), *Zhongguo dandai qingnian nüzuojia pingzhuan* (Commentary biographies of contemporary Chinese young women writers), (Beijing: Funü Press, 1991), p. 153.

own musical expressions. Structurally, the whole story is a combination of fragments. Of its twenty-three sections, only the last ten are connected loosely by the students' preparation for an international composition competition. There is no hero or heroine. Every character is dramatically exaggerated by one feature of his/her personality, and thus becomes strikingly rebellious against conventionality. The story begins with a male student called Li Ming asking for permission to quit the music conservatory, because he feels he is sick, and one of his symptoms is that "he is too healthy and his nerves are too sound, which allows him to do nothing but lie in bed, musing:

> Don't dream about doing anything new. You will try in vain, because you can never surpass Bach. If you cannot surpass Bach, then you cannot become a Master; if you cannot become a Master, then you cannot surpass Bach. If you cannot surpass Bach, you will be ashamed; you will be ashamed of yourself but still you cannot surpass Bach.[11]

The apparent absurdity of his behavior and thought convey the anger and frustration of the ambitious male students who seek their own musical expressions but find they have to follow established western music rules, which as taught by the teachers obstruct their own creativity. Thus they are in a "catch-22" situation: if they do not follow the rules they cannot surpass the western Masters, because the teachers would consider them incorrect; if they follow the rules, they still cannot surpass the Maters because they would be locked in the Masters' musical frame. This situation however, does not seem to be shared by female students.

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[11]. Liu, Sola, "Ni bie wu xuanze" (You have no other choice) in *Hundun jia ligeleng* (Chaos and all that), p. 210.

In spite of their iconoclastic spirit, the male students take male chauvinism for granted and think that women exist to serve them. One of them is going overseas to develop himself. At the time of his departure, another student asks him who will look after him overseas, the latter simply replies: "There are women everywhere." The male/female hierarchy is such that an elderly female music professor, who appears briefly only twice in the story, washes and mends a dirty shirt for a talented male student on one occasion. Women seem to be caretakers everywhere, even when they are in the position of professor.

Women are thus presented as excluded from serious consideration in both career and music. Of the ten students in the composition department, only three are female. They are presented as side characters, unthinking, non-aspiring, merely drifting along in life. Even their nicknames (the boys are given no nicknames) point to this feature. One is nicknamed as Insobriety, because she seldom appears in a sober state. She does not remember things and wants to sleep all day long. She forgets what she has just learned as soon as she finishes her assignment. Another is called Time, because she follows the time-table rigidly which, however, does not affect her dating two male students at the same time. The third one, a girl who "does not want to rack her brain" but is able to "produce simple and moving sound", is called Cat, because she is scared every time she faces difficult assignments, and would utter a sound like a cat mewing. The three are sexually alluring, and are thus disturbing elements in the male dominated music kingdom. Disturbing as they are, once the female students are in love, they subdue their sexuality to serve their boyfriends. Lili, a female student in the performance department finds her boyfriend unwilling to go out with her but happy with her company, so she plays his composition in her performing costume for him. Lili later "moves all her things into his music studio and stays there to support his composition. The only "thinking" woman is a

hysterical student of Chinese literature who tends to dramatize her own life in a romantic way. She is fond of nothing else but traditional classical poems of love and writes poems imitating the classical style and content. In her heart she is actually an old-fashioned, possessive woman with girlish romantic fantasies. She is jealous of music because it is her husband's utmost love. To possess her husband completely she reports their secret marriage to the Conservatory so as to get him expelled. Yet, her husband, a promising music composer, believes that "there is no place without music", and is determined to be an itinerant musician after the expulsion, which means she still cannot possess him completely. The hyperbolic femininity portrayed in the narrative is an ironic response to the prescribed gender difference. Submerged in fun, love, and emotions but excluded from considerations of career and ambition, even when they are well placed in the same situation as their male peers, the female students show an indifference to struggles for ego expression in the male realm of musical composition.

While the contrast between male students and female students refracts the prevailing phallocentric reality, it also points to Liu Sola's view of women as unconscious of themselves in the phallocentric culture, which in turn points to Liu Sola's high consciousness of cultural bondage. This is highlighted in the unconventional, hyperbolic presentation of each female character, which exaggerates their individual and peculiar femininity to the extent of making them unconventional. In this hyperbolic representation of femininity the female students gain rebellious dimensions against the dominant social and cultural milieu that requires them to be model students of socialist youth. Indeed, if even Time, the girl student who follows a rigid time table in her study, accepts courting from two men at the same time, then the other female students must be, as the conservative Professor Jia comments, "hopeless and incorrigible".

Nevertheless, such a narrative mode betrays the limit of the rebelliousness of the story - the male students rebel against conventions in the academic realm and the female students challenge the general life discipline, which repeats in principle the yin/yang, female/male, inferior/superior dichotomy. Given the writer's hyperbolic depiction of femininity which ridicules femininity as well, the authorial attitude towards femininity is ambivalent. This ambivalence refracts the writer's dilemma in terms of the two different sets of gendered values. Once a student at the musical conservatory, Liu Sola obviously wrote herself into the story. Her own rebellion against the norms and conventionalities which restrain the development of the young is projected into both the male and female students. The contradictory gender values assigned to the characters indicate the predicament of a rebellious female in the self-narrative, because she is implicated in both. This ambivalence is more clearly presented in a process of self-splitting in her novella "Blue Sky Green Sea".

Self-Splitting

The novella may be regarded as a young woman singer/composer's cogitation on art and life. The first person narrator recalls her first day in a recording studio, during which time she had nothing recorded, because of the conflict within the recording band and her memory of her late girlfriend Manzi, the latter making her feel unable to sing.

At the beginning of the novella, the female narrator's rebellious attitude is conveyed through the words of a Beatles song quoted by the writer/narrator/singer/composer to begin her story.

> When I find myself in time of trouble,
> Mother Mary comes to me.
> Speaking words of wisdom,

Let it be.
And in my hour of darkness,
She is standing right in front of me.
Speaking words of wisdom,
Let it be.
Whisper words of wisdom.
Let it be.
. . . . . .

The recurrent "Let it be" is translated by the narrator's friend into a Chinese slang phrase meaning "Get away with your shit!" and the narrator says she will "understand the lines according to the translation, not giving a damn whether the translation is right or wrong". The utterance "Get away with your shit" conveys Liu Sola's attitude towards all that which is orthodox or traditional as one can see in the title of her novel *Chaos and All That*, with "all that", according to Liu, referring to "bullshit".

The female narrator/singer/composer's parents are both professional musicians, who look down upon the budding pop music, which the narrator composes and sings. The narrator and her best girlfriend Manzi sing such songs everywhere - on the bus, in the street, in the park, in the field. They sing to their own hearts' content, regardless of their surrounding circumstances and of convention. They defy the old tradition so much that when an old man hears their singing and utters: "Idiots!" the narrator affirms that their singing must be the best music in the world.

Manzi is the narrator's split other, whom the narrator empathizes with and criticizes as well. Manzi represents feminine qualities and womanly conditions for the narrator. Manzi has all the feminine characteristics: she is dreamy, exuberant, emotional, passionate and totally naive. Still a teenager, she "falls in love" with a man who gets her pregnant then deserts her for another

woman. Pregnancy outside marriage was then an unspeakable crime. To have a medical check Manzi naively lies to the doctor that she is thirty already, and consequently gets "scolded like a dog". After that she dare not go to any hospital but tries to induce an abortion by herself. As a result, she dies of hemorrhage in the emergency department of a hospital, where she is condemned as "morally rotten". The narrator hates the society that treated Manzi this way. She also hates men and dreads to be a woman, whose traditional way of living is devoid of self-development. Her critique of traditional womanhood reaches a peak when she imagines what Manzi would have been like if she were still alive: if Manzi were alive she would have become a woman, got married and had a child; she would have totally lost herself in her womanhood, of being a wife and mother plus working outside of the home to earn an income . . . . The conventional femininity thus, as the narrator sees in Manzi, stands in the way of self-realization.

Yet, Manzi also represents the narrator's ideal of art, an art which holds its own dignity and will not bow down to the power of money. In the text, money and fame are clearly regarded as masculine, contradicting the feminine values Manzi represents. When Manzi was still alive and sang well, they rejected an opportunity to record their songs. After Manzi's death, however, the narrator finds herself no longer able to resist the temptation of making a lot of money by singing for recording contracts. Facing reality, the narrator frankly admits: "I do not dislike money; if I had not known Manzi, I could have liked it a bit more." Nevertheless, the memory of Manzi consistently comes up opposing the narrator's desire for fame and money. Thus the narrator undergoes a painful process of self-splitting. When she gets a commercial record contract, she wonders if Manzi would condemn her were she still alive, and when she sings the song she writes in memory of Manzi and is warmly applauded at a concert,

she feels Manzi's soul angrily leaving her. On the day of her first recording, the struggle with her split other, represented by her memory of Manzi, is so intense that she feels she has cancer in her vocal cords and cannot sing at all. Her inability to sing indicates the fundamental contradiction between feminine values and the dominant masculine values. While there is no reconciliation between the two, feminine values are shown as debilitating.

The narrator's predicament implies China's cultural crisis reflected in art and literature in the middle of the economic reforms, when faith was all but destroyed by revolution. Near the end of the story, after a futile day, the singer/narrator walks onto the street at night-fall in an outfit of a western hippie, symbolizing a rebellious gesture against her own cultural tradition. In this outfit the singer/narrator aimlessly roams the streets. She buys three roasted sweet potatoes from a woman peddler, one after another she finds them rotten and throws them away. This detail contributes to building up her discontentment with traditional Chinese culture. While this detail again symbolically accentuates the narrator's rebellious mind, her aimless roaming also points to her spiritual and ideological predicament. This predicament is reiterated in the sudden, incongruent insertion of a short passage about her friend, a detective story writer, who becomes pale and trembling one day because of a predicament in his writing - he has not pinned down a single suspect despite the fact that dozens of the characters in the story have been murdered. For the female narrator/singer the predicament is both professional and personal. Professionally, it is a predicament of her artistic ideal and, personally, it is the predicament of the female self. How does Liu get her heroine out of this predicament? In her novella "In Search of the King of the Singers" (referred to as "King" hereafter),[12]

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[12]. Liu Sola, "In Search of the King of Singers" in *Blue Sky Green Sea and Other Stories.*.

her short story "Runway" (Paodao)[13], and in her novel *Chaos and All That*, Liu shows that the predicament of the artistic ideal is inescapable and in the process of getting out of the predicament, she takes a cynical female position.

"King" can be read as a narrative of the self pursuing an artistic ideal symbolized by the King of the Singers, a legendary figure whom the female narrator and her boyfriend, both singers, look for in deep mountains but fail to locate. During the pursuit the narrator finds that she can no longer endure the hardships and begins to "hate the King of the Singers," because the hard life of pursuing an ideal deprives her of feminine luxuries. As she complains: "If I go on like this, all the things a woman needs will become useless to me!" She eventually quits the pursuit but still vacillates between art and a supposedly "feminine" life.

After she returns to the city, she gives up her artistic pursuit and begins to cater to the popular taste, because, the non-popular, pure art of singing cannot bring her any money. In the process of giving up her former artistic ideal, she makes herself "smart and chip", but finds "there is less and less of the natural woman in [her]."[14] In the sense that there is no such a thing as a "natural woman", this loss of femininity may be seen as a reference to her gaining of more non-feminine qualities - implicitly male qualities. One such quality is to exploit those around you. In the narrator's case, it is making use of men. When asked about her new boyfriend, the narrator replies: "First, he could be my nanny. Second, he could be my brain. Third, he could be the father of my child. Fourth, he could be my father."[15] While one can read this as a wishful reconstruction of

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[13]. Liu Sola, "Paodao" (Runway) in *Hundun jia ligeleng* (Chaos and all that).

[14]. Liu Sola, "In Search of the King of Singers" in *Blue Sky Green Sea and Other Stories*.

[15]. Ibid., p. 75.

the idea of a husband, one can also see that the female subjectivity is playfully sarcastic and blatantly solipsistic. For a husband reconstructed as such would leave the wife with no responsibility and nothing to do but enjoy herself. This hedonistic solipsism will reappear in *Chaos* as the ultimate value to the individual woman in a chaotic age.

Before further discussion of this female solipsism in *Chaos*, however, we need to look back at some of Liu Sola's previous stories so as to facilitate an understanding of her stylistic change in *Chaos*. Let me get back to the mad woman briefly. In the previous section about Can Xue, the mad woman can be seen as the unconforming instinct in human beings. Liu Sola, as daughter of a high ranking cadre, has the rare condition of being able to activate the mad woman in her and to reflect her in her characters. What we can see so far is that, with the female protagonist becoming "less and less of a natural woman", the mad woman becomes increasingly more active. The female consciousness becomes stronger and stronger from the unconsciously anti-heroine female students in "Choice" to the two female narrators/singers respectively in "Blue" and "King". Yet, paradoxically, paralleling with this crescendo, there is also a strong sense of being entrapped in a predicament, as is shown clearly towards the end of "Blue".

This sense of entrapment is also strongly expressed in Liu Sola's short story "Runway".[16] In this story the female narrator, who fends off a rape attempted by a film director who habitually rapes actresses, finds her success in performance to be a self-invited spiritual rape. As a clown, she is given the "Non-Runway Award" for her ingenuity in performing art. To honor her success, the narrator/heroine is placed on a satin flag for exhibition. Thus like Kafka's protagonist in "Metamorphasis", she loses her human status. She is

scrutinized by spectators (some with microscopes), who put forward all kinds of suggestions for her to "improve" herself. To please the commentators' different opinions, she loses her unique artistic characteristics. "To conquer the stage where performers compete with each other and the space which is filled with the audience", she "has to do somersaults, spins, hand-stands and talk nonsense, running all over the stage while screaming". She says: "When you want to cry you laugh; when you want to sleep you jump." She is no longer herself. She finally realizes that her success is a self-invited spiritual rape. To escape from this rape, she leaves the place by airplane. But after she gets off the plane she finds she is alone on a runway that leads nowhere, and she identifies the runway as the non-runway after which her award is named. Thus the self she is trying to recover turns out to be hopelessly entrapped. The sense of being entrapped is the matrix of nihilism in philosophy and absurdism in literary expression. Thus it is no wonder that Liu Sola, with all her early access to and favor of western absurdism, wrote a seemingly absurdist novel *Chaos and All That* in which a cynical narrative voice tells about a female self historically entrapped and decentered.

The Fragmentary Self-Narrative

In 1988 Liu, divorced, went to London, where she continued to write while making a living composing music. In 1989 she wrote her novel *Chaos and All That* (Hundun jia ligeleng) which was first published in Hong Kong in 1990. If in "Blue" Liu identifies with the rebellious spirit of western youth, in *Chaos* the heroine, who lives in London like the writer herself, reflects, against the western cultural background provided by London, on her life experience from childhood through the Cultural Revolution up to the time of her stay in London. To capture

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[16]. Liu Sola, "Paodao" (Runway) in *Hunadun jia ligeleng* (Chaos and all that).

the rhythm and truth of a lived reality, her reminiscence paradoxically starts from her birth, with its process frequently interpolated by fragments of her life in London and letters from her relatives and friends in China, and between these episodes there are no linguistic connections or other technical transitions. The apparent structurelessness of the novel is actually a stylization attempting to capture the nature of self amid the absurdities of a chaotic age. Moreover, in spite of her cynicism, Liu tries, as in all her other stories, to find meaning for the female self.

Narrated alternatively in the first and third person voice on behalf of the heroine Huang Haha, who has a life contour similar to that of the writers' own, the story can be regarded as an open-ended finale of self-discovery, which provides a temporary solution (or non-solution) to the narrator's predicament between west and east, between male and female values. As a work of fiction, the novella does not seek detailed correspondence between the narrative and the writer's personal life; instead it represents the general experience of a generation of Chinese women through meaningful details, representing the familial, cultural, social, and political functions in the process of their growing up. Not a biography per se, the story exemplifies "the feminist recognition that it is the representative aspects of the author's experience rather than her unique individuality which are important, allowing for the inclusion of fictive but representative episodes distilled from the lives of other women."[17] As a self-narrative, the novella conjoins with Liu Sola's works discussed previously in the procedure of building up a "image-repertoire", to which Barthes compared his autobiography.

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[17]. Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change*, p. 94.

A comparison with Barthes' own autobiography would tell us more about *Chaos*'s autobiographical nature. Barthes regards his autobiography as a mirror, in which he sees a reflection. Frequently he uses the third-person pronoun to refer to himself, as if he were talking about someone else. For Barthes, there is no centered self in the image repertoire, because life goes through stages and because a self-narrative is a mirror – no reflected image is in any sense truer than others. An autobiography does not mean any single authentic self, therefore, he regards his own autobiography as "almost a novel". As Barthes writes in his fragmentary autobiography:

> the image-repertoire is taken over by several masks (*personae*), distributed according to the depth of the stage (and yet no one – *personne*, as we say in French – is behind them). The book does not choose, it functions by alternation, it proceeds by impulses of the image system pure and simple and by critical approaches, but these very approaches are never anything but effects of resonance: nothing is more a matter of the image system, of the imaginary, than (self-) criticism. The substance of this book, ultimately, is therefore totally fictive . . . *almost* a novel.[18]

If Barthes' fragmentary autobiography is "*almost* a novel", in contrast, *Chaos*, a novel per se, is written in fragments conducive to bringing out what the writing consciousness takes as the truth which, as reflected in the title, is chaos and (all that - "bull-shit") incoherence. With two alternating narrative voices and excerpts from letters, *Chaos* "proceeds by impulses of the image system pure and simple". And none is a centered self. Moreover, *Chaos* can be read as what Barthes described his own autobiography: "a *recessive* book (which falls back, but

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[18]. Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, p. 120.

which may also gain perspective thereby)",[19] as the narrator goes back to her time of birth right at the beginning of the novel.

The narrator's recessive desire can be traced back to Liu Sola's earlier story "In Search of the King of Singers", and we will find the recessive motive lies in resistance to ideology like what Barthes wrote about in his own autobiography: "[it is] . . . the book of my resistances to my own ideas".[20] In "King" the narrator becomes recessive upon a motive to resist stereotyped ideology. She talks about a "type of shoe" which has made her speechless on matters of art. She says: "before I put that type of shoe on, I could say anything that came into my mind. Now, giving my views on this subject will simply be suicidal." Obviously, she hinted at the fact that airing one's view on matters of art in a free manner would be offensive to the conservative power controlling art in China, and may even end up with fatal consequences. While she has learned not to speak, she turns recessive towards her former innocent self. As she goes:

> I had a dream about my former self, what I used to be, and what I grew out of. It was a thick, white bean-curd-like lump and it was lying on a stretch of salt-soaked wilderness where not a blade of grass grew. Soon the sun, the rain, the tides, the mountains and rocks came one after another to change it. And then there were flowers, plants and trees to adorn it, spirit of heaven and earth to nourish it, and the practical education of human world to shape it. So it became me, lying on a huge, warm and comfortable bed. This I know quite clearly. But I can never make out when I bought those shoes by mistake and let them take possession of me, leading me I know not where.[21]

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[19]. Ibid., p. 119.

[20]. Ibid.

[21]. Liu Sola, *Blue Sky Green Sea and Other Stories*, p. 86.

With this nostalgia and the desire to find out when the narrator is possessed by "those shoes", *Chaos* begins with the first-person narrator's impossible reminiscence of her birth, and then, continues in non-chronological order through fragments of her school years during the Cultural Revolution up to her life in London.

The self in the book is a center-less fantasy of childhood and adolescence spent during the Cultural Revolution and her student life in London. As the narrative progresses, the matter of growing up in China is shown as receiving ongoing indoctrination and training so as to live up to the expectations of parents and teachers but above all to the wishes of the totalitarian power. The following are some typical fragments about this indoctrination:

> "I want to be a bluebottle," I wrote in my composition for school.
>
> . . .
>
> The composition teacher said that my style was elegant enough, but the essay couldn't go up on the walls unless I portrayed the bluebottle as a class enemy. She made me add, "O, that the winter would freeze me! O, that fires would consume me! That the sewer would bear me away! That a flyswatter would slap me! The insecticide would..." So it goes.
>
> "... studied so hard that he stabbed his leg with an awl to stay awake and kept his head up with a rope hung from the rafters...," intoned the form mistress.
>
> "...the horrors of the old society...the theme of this paragraph of our text is...," explained the composition teacher.
>
> ...
>
> "Uncle Lei Feng [22] wrote in his revolutionary diary every day. Could your dairies be published the way his was? If not, then there may be something wrong with your political consciousness," warned the tutor from the Young Pioneers.
>
> ...

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[22]. Lei Feng was a soldier of the People's Liberation Army, who was set up as a self-less model soldier for people to emulate by Mao in the early 1960s.

> I had revolutionary aspirations and a sound physique – I was healthy in body, mood, and spirit. All I needed was a red kerchief, and I was practically ready to shake hands with the leaders. "Two-thirds of the world's foreigners are languishing in despair and need us to go and save them...."[23]

It is made clear that to live is to be acted upon by ideologies and historical conditions. In this situation self is all but non-existent. In one episode the heroine asks: "Where is my world?" Instead of a direct answer, lines come up from different songs most of which are revolutionary, popular in different political periods crossing the years of the heroine's growth. On the one hand, this song world is symbolic of a utopia, a paradise, which, as Liu in her "Blue Sky Green Sea" points out, "never touches on real matters such as abortion and death"; on the other, it attests to a historicity which has left its indelible mark on the self.

Interposed into and interacting with this historicity is a language of the body, of concrete details such as swearing, puberty exploration, love, sex, death, toilet and manure. The concrete experience becomes the only thing one can hold onto for a meaningful explanation in a chaotic world. A similar recognition is identifiable in Colin Falck when he writes:

> The move towards a literature of experience represents a fundamental shift of sensibility, because it represents the recognition that concrete experience - and with it the literature of concrete experience - is our most essential means of access to reality.[24]

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[23]. Liu Sola, *Chaos and All That* (Hundun jia ligeleng), trans. Richard King (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), pp. 5-7.

[24]. Colin Falck, *Myth, Truth and Literature: Towards a True Post-modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 157.

It is with such concrete experience that the self-discovery narrative of *Chaos* refutes the two metanarratives: the revolutionary utopian narrative and the traditional patriarchal narrative.

Playfully profane, the narrative of concrete experience in *Chaos* is a hyperbolic, condensed representation of the body. One of the expressions of the body is swearing, which, as the hallmark of Mao's Red Guards, is used unsparingly by the young. For example, in one episode, the eleven-year-old narrator and her friend have to practice swearing in order to join the Red Guards:

> "Fuck," she said.
> "Fuck," I responded. So far so good.
> "Fuck you."
> "Fuck you."
> "Fuck your mother."
> "Fuck your mother."
> "Fuck your mother's eggs!"
> "Fuck your mother's eggs!" Still no problem.
> "Fuck your mother's bloody eggs!"
> ...
> "Roll your mother's bloody eggs!"
> ...
> "Roll your mother's fucking eggs!"
> ...
> " You fucking bastard!"

Accompanying the swearing, which is sexually explicit, is a recurrent country children's rhyme about eating rice fried with eggs, which points to an undercurrent instinctual stomach drive beneath the maddening revolution, so as to enhance the striking contrast between reality and the revolutionary utopia. In

this sense, the rhyme embodies the experience of life on a somatic level. As the narrator goes: "And then there was my family:

> Eggs and rice, eggs and rice,
> Eat them once and eat them twice;
> Open wide, here they come,
> Right into your tum-tum-tum.
> Poo your pants, poo your pants;
> Wash'em in the river when you get the chance.
> Up your pants froggies come,
> Bite you on your bum-bum-bum.[25]

The rhyme is composed entirely from a language of the body, which undermines any sublimated grand narrative. In its crudest details, such a language is also devastating to any recounting of a romance.

The heroine Haha and Michael, her university teacher in London, fall in love with each other at first sight. Keeping his rich girlfriend at the same time, Michael loves Haha because she is exotic. When having dinner with him, Haha, as if to feed his appetite for exotic flavor, talks non-stop about a Chinese village toilet:

> If you'd take a lamp in, you'd have seen the maggots all over the place. The floor was covered with them; really, you couldn't help standing on them. In the spring the maggots would all turn into chrysalides and crush under your feet. Sometimes when you are squatting, you'd see the corpses of pigs, dogs, and chickens that had drowned and resurfaced, floating in the shit. If you didn't watch out, you might fall in yourself, like taking a dive into a swimming pool![26]

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[25]. I quoted this rhyme from Richard King's translation *Chaos and All That* by Liu Sola, p. 2.

[26]. Ibid., p. 15.

The language of the body carries a more obvious feminist dimension in the episode of the female educated youth Wang Hua's marriage. In order to support her younger sister, as both of her parents died during the Cultural Revolution, Wang marries a peasant widower, who is old enough to be her father. The peasant is considered better off because he has two toilets with huge manure pits. The eating, pooing, and washing processes of human beings are strung together by the ducks who take turns to swim in the manure pits and the village pond where women wash vegetables and clothes. The marriage and the manure pits hit upon a dual focus within the tension and interaction between the personal and the political. Such details are significant in revealing that the basic needs of the stomach sabotage the poetic/song world of revolution while exposing the unchanged situation of women who marry for survival. The sardonic details of human manure and the crude country toilet in the episode remind us of the scatological language in Can Xue's stories and again proves to be a powerful antidote to utopianism.

If the playful details of human manure claim "Nature" as the ultimate strategy opposing the grand narrative of communism, Liu also unsparingly denounces patriarchal ideology in the episode which selects the modern example of Wang Baochuan. In this episode, a Dog-head Recommendation Committee is set up to award a toy dog-head to the woman who can retain as many original lines as possible in using an opera libretto sung by the traditional model wife Wang Baochuan in a well-known traditional opera to describe her own life. The original libretto describes how Wang endures a hard life, looks after her parents-in-law, and waits faithfully for eighteen years for her husband's return from the battlefield. This burlesque of fitting the present-day woman's life into traditional patterns of feminine virtue exhorted by patriarchal ideology is highly satirical, and the reward of a toy dog head conveys a playful disdain towards the virtue.

Three women sing their songs based on the old pattern, but none can fit it. The failure of the candidates reveals the contradiction between traditional Chinese womanhood and the modern Chinese woman's life.

While the old feminine model is no longer sustainable, an alternative, rebellious life style is offered. With the model wife Wang's original lines completely altered, the third woman writes: "Oppressed by marriage, my world became smaller/Divorced, I see the earth wider and the sky higher/ . . . /You try to please all sides/Only to lose your self without knowing it/Whilst I live just as I like/Life becomes easier and happier." Her easier and happier life, however, bears a hedonistic tendency as she buys "designer label dresses", and with "uncovered shoulders", she "exposes breasts to allure men". For her, "women have their own world/and it's foolish for a woman not even to bare her neck". Totally self-centered, the aim of a woman's life is to be attractive for the sake of pleasure, if not for love. For when "we walk towards the same end [here death is implied]/we might as well walk with laughter". This alternative female life style, though rebellious against the traditional pattern, is nihilistic and solipsistic, devoid of existential obligation and beyond the budget of most working women who form the majority of the female population in China. Moreover, it would not do women themselves any good if women base their "joy" of life on sexual relationships only, which have already been shown in the story as a precarious and unreliable source of emotional and spiritual sustenance.

This solipsism and nihilism, however, is just part of an ambivalent and contradictory self-consciousness. As the subject/self of the enunciation consists of several personae by way of multi-level narratives in the novel, a consciousness of a classical category emerges in the female protagonist Haha, whose name in Chinese is an onomatope for laughter, so the name conveys a playful and non-serious attitude towards life. In spite of the meaning of her name, Haha herself

cannot help acting in a contradictory way because of the education she has received. As the narrative goes, she "keeps writing 'right' and 'wrong' on a piece of paper", which "has followed her all her life, and is stamped on whatever she does". This has given her "numerous troubles and worries" because she judges not only herself but others as well with her "right or wrong" dichotomous standard.[27] Thus, although the story is told in a playful tone, deep down in the text, exists the writer's characteristic vacillation between what we may roughly call a classical attitude and a modern one.

As the vacillation remains unresolved, the novel comes to an end in the disagreement over the selection of TV programs between Haha's mother and the family nurse - the former wants to watch the film, *Anna Karenina*, whilst the latter would rather watch the traditional opera Wang Baochuan. In such a finale resurfaces women's history – stories told by men. Both the mother and the nurse belong to the older generation who linger between two feminine models: the virtuous wife of Confucian moral tradition and the enlightened woman of a humanist tradition for whom love is everything. Emerging from such a historical scene is the younger woman, who with all her ambivalence and vacillation, finds herself not only a "centerless", "random assemblage of contingent and idiosyncratic needs" as Richard Rorty says, but also an agent in the making of a changing history.[28]

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[27]. Liu Sola, *Hundun jia ligeleng* (Chaos and all that), p. 11.

[28]. Richard Rorty, "Freud and Moral Reflection" in *Essays on Heidegger and Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 155.

Chapter Nine

Parody

If Can Xue's narrative incoherence is to some extent limited by a linguistic solipsism, that solipsism can be seen as symptomatic of a withdrawal of consciousness from knowing the other. And as such it indicates an inadequate female self-consciousness, because the "supreme self-consciousness is the consciousness of the other".[1] The female consciousness of the other, however, is strikingly prominent in fiction by Fang Fang, whose "Landscape" (*Fengjin*) published in 1987 "drew the curtain of new realism".[2]

Critical realism in China went through a hopeful development and then suffered expulsion due to the promulgation of socialist realism.[3] Beginning with Fang Fang's "Landscape", a new form of realism came to

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[1]. M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. xxxiii.

[2]. Chen Xiaoming, "Fankang weiji: lun xin xieshi " (Resisting crisis: on new realism) in Chen Xiaoming (ed.), *Zhongguo xin xieshi xiaoshuo jingxuan* (Selected works of China's new realism) (Lanzhou: Gansu Renmin Press, 1994), p. 5.

[3]. I use the word "hopeful" here because when realism was introduced into China, it was hoped the new literature would help to change China, and the writers often placed hope in their works. For example, in his famous story "Medicine" (Yao) Lu Xun put a wreath on top of the revolutionary martyr's grave to symbolize hope. For more reference about

the scene in the late 1980s. By 1991, the national literary journal *Zhong Shan,* had published exclusively for two years a series of prose fiction which the critics named "new realist works".

In so far as the term "realism" was an import from the west, the term "new realism" may be regarded as imported as well. In spite of this connection, the Chinese new realism had, as Miu Junjie pointed out, "resulted from social life in China and the development of Chinese literature."[4] However, a comparison between western neorealism and Chinese new realism can be useful in understanding the latter. The most important school of neorealism, according to George J. Becker, is the one which appeared in Italy after World War II.[5] This neorealism affected both literature and the cinema. Explaining how it came into being, Becker writes:

> [T]his outburst is traceable in large part to social causes. During the forty years of the Fascist regime it was impossible to tell the truth; there was official encouragement of literature which dealt with something other than the here and now and which rose to an innocuous level of abstraction or dealt in untruthful stereotypes. The new Italy needed an *apertura,* needed to let in light and air on both the actuality of the former regime and on the actuality of the newly fermenting social order.[6]

Chinese realism, see Marston Anderson, *The Limits of Realism: Chinese Fiction in the Revolutionary Period.*

[4]. Miu Junjie, "Lun Zhongguo wenxue zhong de xin xieshi zhuyi" (On new realism in Chinese literature). Beijing: *Xinhua Wenzhai,* 9 (1993).

[5]. *Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature* (Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster Incorporated Publishers, 1995.) explains literary "neorealism" as associated exclusively with Italy as well.

[6]. George J. Becker, *Realism in Modern Literature* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co. Inc., 1980), p. 128.

The above description would explain the outburst of Chinese new realism well, if we change "Fascist" into "socialist" and "Italy into "China". The realist impulse to tell the truth lies in both Italian neorealism and Chinese new realism, and both re-describe realities. Chinese new realism, however, is marked by "feminine" characteristics if seen from a gendered cultural view.

Such "feminine" characteristics are of course not exclusive to women writers but also show up in male writers' fiction of the new realist school. Liu Zhenyun, one of the best known writers of the new realist school, for example, begins his most typical story with a single-sentence paragraph: "The one *jin* [500 grams] bean-curd in Xiao Lin's home turned sour." Bean-curd is a cheap and common food for ordinary Chinese. Yet the very triviality of the insignificant event is high-profiled, followed up by a series of trivial events harassing a young married couple who are conventionally supposed to focus their energy on socialist construction. The plain, anti-climax narrative of their dilemma ends with the male protagonist's Xiao Lin's dream, in which he sleeps under a thick layer of chicken feathers which smother him. Interestingly, the story is entitled "Chicken Feathers All Over" (Yidi ji mao), echoing the Chinese idiom "chicken feathers garlic skins" (*jimao shuanpi*) which refers to trivial and insignificant things. If the idiom has a feminine connotation in its meaning of triviality, it echoes another derogatory Chinese idiom, which may be literally rendered as "grandmother and mother" (*popo mama*), denoting, among other things, woman's "excessively" detailed way of recounting trivial things. The story "Chicken Feathers All Over" (Yidi ji

mao) is written in such a feminine manner, which estranges and thus refreshes an unpleasant everyday reality to challenge the grand master narrative of socialist realism. Liu Zhenyun gives his reason for the literary approach:

> I have described the close relationship between the political culture of China and our national psychology, living styles, and daily behaviors . . . People living in our society are so closely related to politics that any daily trivial matter would have something to do with it. For example, apparently simple matters such as to sleep well, to eat well, to get good medicine, to be well hospitalized when sick, even to travel by train are related to your social status and controlled by a ranking system. These are necessary phenomena in social development, but are often neglected. On the other hand, we have accepted a grand idealist education, which has become our life guidance. We have become used to such a kind of life, and would feel dislocated if life were not like this.[7]

Liu Zhenyun further considers a Chinese writer as "modern enough if s/he could depict such daily lives of the Chinese".[8] It involves nothing less than a new estrangement of the familiar so as to turn the boredom of triviality into hilarious and provocative fiction.

What I would call parodic details come in handy for new realist writers. Following Bakhtin, one may say that it serves to distance the writer from an established literary language,[9] because it takes fiction beyond the traditional language range, and shows an ironic feature by

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[7]. Luo Jun & Chen Xiaoming, "Liu Zhenyun tan ta de zhengzhi wenhua xiaoshuo" (Liu Zhengyun's talk about his political-cultural fiction), *Zhonghua ernü* (China's sons and daughters), 5 (1992).

[8]. Ibid.

employing parody. In regard to Chinese literature, the parodic detail reconfirms the age of the commoners, a time when the excessive heroic literature and grand theories had depleted people's enthusiasm for lofty ideals and exhausted their patience to put up with any obvious sublimation in literature. The parodic detail, therefore, becomes an effective means for dismantling the world of the grand narratives—"theories that provide totalizing explanations".[10]

This chapter shall analyze Fang Fang's parodic redescription of the working class, intellectuals, and Chinese society in general as well as her creation of a new type of woman character. I have also included Fang Fang's non-woman centered stories, because they demonstrate a supreme female consciousness in the consciousness of the other. Through my discussion I shall try to point out how the female consciousness of the other conduces to Fang Fang's parodic fiction which, with a remarkable ironist style, evidences a narrative not only new in the context of contemporary Chinese women's fiction, but also new in Chinese literature taken as a whole.

Re-describe the Masters of the Socialist State

In the discourse of socialist realism, working class people are described as "the leading class and masters of the new China". In her "Landscape" Fang Fang desublimated "the working class" by describing the working class life in devastatingly parodic details. The novella

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[9]. M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, p. 309.

deconstructs the myth about the proletarian class by representing its members living at a subsistence level, completely unconscious of their existential status and totally ignorant of the "historic mission" prescribed by Marxism.

The story portrays a workers' family consisting of two illiterate parents and nine children. The family depends upon searching in the garbage for vegetable leaves to go with rice. The parents and children all live in a wooden shed of thirteen square meters, with the youngest son sleeping on the bare earthen floor under the parents' bed and the oldest son working night shift for years on end as there is no space for him to sleep at night. Verbal and physical fights with one another are the daily routines of family life, of which Fang Fang's parodic description is loaded with irony. As she describes a fight scene between Mother and Father:

> Father and Mother's voices were so loud it was frightening. Even trains thundering past every seven minutes couldn't muffle the racket they were making and every one of the neighbors came over to see what all the fuss was.[11]

With a touch of humor, the description is devoid of any pathos or sympathy – the fighting, though frightening, is a mere fuss. What makes the fight even funnier are the spectators' commentaries, uttered as if they were watching an amusing play.

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[10]. Michael Groden & Martin Kreiswirth (eds.), *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory & Criticism* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), p. 586.

[11]. Fang Fang, *Three Novellas by Fang Fang* (Beijing: Panda Books, 1996), p. 100.

The fight occurs just at dinner-time, so "all the members of the audience brought their bowls and crowded together in front of the door".

> They chew their food while chuckling and assessing Father and Mother's performance. When Mother spat at Father, it was judged that her style wasn't as good as last time. When Father, so angry that he couldn't control himself, smashed a rice bowl, quite a few voices were in agreement—the sound of a bowl smashing couldn't compete with that of a thermos bottle shattering. Some who knew the inside story added that our family didn't have a thermos bottle, otherwise Father wouldn't be smashing bowls. All of them could attest that father was one of the noisiest good old boys in this district.[12]

In this almost hilarious description, the seemingly inadvertent detail that "our family didn't have a thermos bottle" reveals the poverty of the family more powerfully than anything else.[13] The callous humor of the audience shows their familiarity with the fight. Considering that the audience is also workers, the scene shatters the previous propaganda about the nobility of the working class. The parodic details describing the life led by the "masters of the socialist China" thus takes on the dimension of "counter-ideology".[14]

From the viewpoint of gender relationships, the fight between Father and Mother departs from the popular feminist consideration of oppression and rebellion. For the fighting here is a weird, personal way to

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[12]. Ibid.

[13]. A thermos bottle is cheap and is the most common household possession in China as it is a rule that drinking water must be boiled and usually kept hot in a thermos bottle.

[14]. Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, p. 104.

obtain tender love in a phallocentric relationship, in which Father's virility commands Mother's "deepest" respect. Throughout Mother's life,

> Father was her proudest possession. Even though during her forty years of marriage he had beaten her thousands of times, she was a hundred percent satisfied with her lot. Father's beating Mother was practically at the core of their relationship. When he had finished beating her, Father would become incomparably humble and meek and almost warm-hearted even. Therefore, had Mother gone for quite some time without being beaten, she would purposely provoke Father and send him into a fury.[15]

This unusual description of conjugal relations opposes our normal understanding of the terms, as it is neither hateful abuse, nor tenderness, nor apathy, but poignant wretchedness, especially in the case of the poor woman.

The distanced yet intimate tone of the narrative is achieved as if it were spoken by the youngest son who died a baby and was buried in the dirt under the window of the family dwelling. Such a mysterious narrator, whose existence denies the mirror status of realist works, is omnipresent as an invisible witness to the activities of the family members. With its close kinship status, the narrative voice assures the validity of the family members' striving for personal happiness.

Therefore, the social-climbing of Seventh Brother, who is the youngest son and also the most bullied and despised in the family, is presented in a sympathetic light with revealing glimpses of the hypocrisy of socialist morality. During the Cultural Revolution, he accidentally

becomes a worker-peasant-soldier university student.[16] Later on he is "enlightened" on how to strive for a better life by his fellow classmate, who makes himself a "model young man" by marrying a terminally ill cancer patient and by getting his "noble" act publicized through the dying woman's letter to the university. The motivating power for such striving comes from their miserable life. As the young "enlightener", who obviously led a underprivileged life in the socialist state, instructs Seventh Brother: "go over your miserable life every night and think that if you do not change your fate your offspring will live the same life, and then you will have the strength to create a better future for yourself." Following this instruction, Seventh Brother deserts his girlfriend to marry a high-ranking cadre's daughter who is sterile and ten years his senior (given the traditional Chinese male mentality about the importance of procreation, the sterility of the woman points up the marriage as an act of Seventh Brother's social climbing). He finally becomes a promising provincial official and wins respect from his parents and his siblings.

While highlighting the cruelty, poverty, and hypocrisy surrounding the growth of the young man into an ambitious government official, Fang Fang, who was once a laborer herself, returns the laboring class to its actual low status in Chinese society. Understanding their underprivileged lives, especially in contrast to the privileged official class, Fang Fang wrote: "compared with those who have all the privileges without making any

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[15]. Fang Fang, *Three Novellas by Fang Fang*, p. 100.

[16]. As part of the revolutionary program the Cultural Revolution opened China's tertiary educational institutes to factory workers, peasants, and soldiers of the People's Liberation Army, regardless of their academic qualifications so that the proletariat could virtually dominate the cultural area in the upper structure of the state. Such university students were called "worker-peasant-soldier students".

effort, people like Seventh Brother are much nobler. After all, they have racked their brains and tried hard . . . One should not condemn their ways of striving, but the society in which they have grown up."[17] Fang Fang's calm and detached narrative voice, which trivializes and unmasks all that used to be lofty and grandiose, marks the story as the first noticeable example of new realism.

When Fang Fang mocks a character, she is sarcastic about the social circumstances and the political movements that have made such a character. Thus her mockery of the working class members is pointed at the "revolutionary politics" that has misguided them. The theoretical ascent of the working class in China was accompanied by a propaganda which degraded knowledge and learning, and which consequently discriminated against intellectuals. Fang Fang's writing redressed this situation with great sarcasm. In her novella "The White Calf" (Bai ju) the male character Xiaonan's mother is an illiterate worker in a textile factory,

> although she did not know as many Chinese characters as Wang Li,[18] could nevertheless make out twenty or thirty of them. On account of such literacy she had for quite some time been a member of the Workers' Propaganda Team at a university. It was said that professors would have to nod and bow to her humbly. Over exulted, Xiaonan's mother forgot the dozens of characters she had once been able to recognize.[19]

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[17]. Fang Fang, "Guanyu Qige" (About Seventh Brother) *Zhongpian xiaoshuo xuankan* (The selected novellas journal), 5 (1988), p. 40.

[18]. Wang Li was a professor of Beijing University and one of the best known linguists in the Chinese language.

[19]. Fang Fang, "Bai ju" (White calf) in Fang Fang, *Bai meng* (White dream) (Nanjing: Jiangsu Wenyi Press, 1995), p. 123.

The so-called "Workers' Propaganda Team" was sent to govern universities and high schools, as a gesture of occupying the "upper structure" of the socialist China during the Cultural Revolution. This workers' seizure of the "upper structure" is a historical irony. Again, by re-description, Fang Fang estranges a familiar Chinese political scene: the glorification of ignorance and the humiliation of knowledge, which culminated in the Cultural Revolution. The parody becomes even more playful with Xiaonan, also a working class member, who "had great admiration" for his illiterate mother.

> The first sign of his admiration was his deep pain over his inability to forget the few hundred characters he knew, however hard he had tried. When he was still unemployed he once went to a warehouse where, he had been told, nice cigarettes were stored. He naturally desired a few, but was deterred by a plate on the door of the warehouse, on which were the words: "Staff only; heavy punishment upon trespassing." Xiaonan was so angry with himself that he beat his own head and cried: "Why the hell haven't I forgotten these few characters? God damn it!"[20]

Sometime later Xiaonan steals two apples from a peddler, which is seen by an old lady of the neighborhood committee, who puts up a warning on the door of Xiaonan's home, which contains words such as "Wang Xiaonan, aged twenty, stole apples from a stall, which shows he has a mean character." When Xiaonan returns home, he

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[20]. Ibid.

> was able to identify each character and he understood the whole warning. Afterwards he beat his head with his fists and cried: "How can I still remember so many words? I've even made out the difficult characters such as *beilie* [meaning 'despicable']. Holy shit!"[21]

Each of the above passages goes a step further in its denunciation of an aberrant reality. The parodic details reveal an absurd world in which, against our normal understanding, pilfering is not shameful but the ability to read is; and to know what is despicable becomes despicable itself. The narrative develops the logic that despises learning and knowledge to the extreme, and leads the reader to an absurd outcome. As Xiaonan beats his head and the reader burst into laughter, the parody strikes its moral home.

Re-describe the Intellectuals

Fang Fang grew up in an intellectual family whose scholastic tradition can be traced back to dynastic times. While having pride in her family's intellectual history, she scrutinized the declining of intellectual integrity in socialist China.[22]

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[21]. Ibid., p. 124.

[22]. Liu Zaifu recalls that during the Cultural Revolution people became beasts, some were caged and some watched the caged. There were only two kinds of people in China: sadists and masochists. The sadists torture the masochists with the most sinister language and other means whilst the masochists spared no effort to criticize and insult themselves as well as their fathers' and grandfathers' generations. They cursed themselves but did not forget to report on others. Both categories of people include intellectuals. See Li Zehou & Liu Zaifu, *Li Zehou & Liu Zaifu duihua lu* (The dialogue between Li Zehou and Liu Zaifu) (Hong Kong: Tiandi Tushu Gongsi, 1996), p. 81. [22]. The problem of Chinese intellectuals is a complicated one. For more reference, one may read Benjamin Schwarts (ed.), *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the legacy of the May Fourth of 1919*. Berkeley: University of California press, 1986; Lin Yu-sheng, *The Crisis of Chinese Consciousness: Radical Anti-traditionalism in the May Fourth Era*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979; Liu Zaifu, *Fangzhu zhushen* (Banish the gods). Hong Kong: Tiandi Tushu, 1994. For a definition of intellectuals in question here, see footnote 21, Chapter Five.

Up till the Party took power in 1949, Chinese intellectuals enjoyed intellectual freedom to a certain extent. They could criticize or choose not to work for the government if they did not like the ruling ideas and administrative practices. The CCP's totalitarianism does not tolerate any intellectual freedom, and Mao had a deep suspect of intellectuals. To deprive them of the legitimacy of independent thinking, Mao compared intellectuals to the "hairs" on a "skin" in his notorious metaphor: "If the skin does not exist, the hairs will have no place to attach themselves to."[23] The Chinese intellectuals were made dependent upon the government for a living and submit themselves to an endless "thought reform" through incessant political movements, in which they were criticized, struggled against, and humiliated. During the Cultural Revolution, intellectuals were among the first targets of attack and were more humiliated than ever. Under the CCP's dictatorship, the majority of Chinese intellectuals degenerated into a "rice-bowl group" (*fanwan jituan*), who ceased to function as the conscience of society and tried merely to get by in life.[24]

Although the intellectual group also included women, women's historical marginality provided Fang Fang a vantage point from which she observes the declining of intellectual integrity. In her gendered position this scrutinization is also a daughter's scrutinization of the father, dispossessing the latter of a halo formed by traditional culture. As the first-

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[23]. Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong xuanji* (Selected works of Mao Zedong), vol. 5 (Beijing: Renmin Press, 1977), p. 487.

[24]. I borrowed the term *fanwan jituan* from He Qinglian, *Zhongguo de xianjin* (The primary capital accumulation in contemporary China) (Hong Kong: Mingjing Press, 1997), p. 401.

person female narrator in "The Sunk Ship" (Chen chuan) says about her boyfriend who is a teacher by profession:

> Behind his strong self-respect is a deep sense of inferiority. At first I thought this was his particular psyche, but later on I found many Chinese, except cadres' children and industrial workers, share the same psychological state. The meek intellectuals and humble peasants put gestures of self-respect against their feelings of inferiority in the background. The former know that their social position is obscure and the latter know that they are ignorant.[25]

Nevertheless, the intellectuals were culturally and economically superior to the peasants, and they are the ones who write. The discourses after the Cultural Revolution, especially the discourse of humanism, re-depicted intellectuals as the social conscience and as cultural heroes. But very few literary works ever questioned the intellectuals about their subservience and their betrayal of intellectual conscience at the moment of crises in the past political movements, or examined them in their personal behaviors. Fang Fang made a parodic representation of the intellectuals in these aspects.

Very often, Fang Fang inserts a piece of conversation vividly true to life to expose the pervasive moral decline, from which intellectuals are not exempted. Take a passage from her "White Dream" (Bai meng) for example, in which two doctors, who share one consultation room chat along, while examining their patients:

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[25]. Fang Fang, "Chen chuan" (The sunken ship) in *Shuiyi biaobai* (Random expressions) (Wuhan: Hubei Cishu Press, 1993), p.118.

> The male doctor was examining the patient's mouth, and the female doctor was listening to the heartbeat of a child. The male doctor said: "Open your mouth. Eh—Dr Chen, how much did your son score in the entrance examination?" The female doctor said: "Over four hundred." The male doctor then asked: "Is there any hope?" The female doctor replied: "Doesn't matter, I have an acquaintance in the Education Bureau." "Is the person willing to help?" "How dare he not help? It is through me that he got all the medicine free in his name for his village mother-in-law who is suffering from cancer. Put on your clothes [to the patient under her examination]!" The male doctor said: "Of course we will not do such things for nothing. Tonsillitis [to the patient under his examination]!"[26]

Doctors are well respected in society and they are supposed to be responsible and earnest in medical work. The two doctors' irresponsible attitude towards their patients and their ease in involving themselves in "back door" connections points to the depth of moral degeneration of the intellectual majority.

Moral degeneration goes hand in hand with political subservience, towards which Fang Fang is ruthlessly sarcastic. In her "White Fog" (Bai wu),[27] she jeers at an elderly high school teacher who "transforms newspaper language into his own speech" to lecture his son daily. He offers to shift his name on the housing allocation list from the second from the top to the bottom in exchange for a commendation in the educational reference newspaper. He believes that the leaders should live

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[26]. Fang Fang, "Bai meng" (White dream) in *Bai meng* (Nanjing: Jiangsu Wenyi Press, 1995), p. 17.

[27]. Ibid.

in much bigger houses, whilst his family of five (the couple plus the grandma, a grown-up son and a daughter) comprising three generations live in one fifteen-squre-metre room with curtains as partitions. He instructed his whole family with a "noble" face, saying: "fifteen-squre-metres is enough for us. Some families do not have two square meters per person on average. We should answer the government's call and be modest. It is every citizen's obligation to share the worries of the country and the government." He writes an article in the spirit of the CCP's call to educate the young people and, in the hope of getting it published, presents it "for criticism" to a journalist, who might open a "back-door" for him because the journalist is his son's good friend. The high school teacher is a caricature of a huge collective of Chinese intellectuals who have helped in the CCP's propaganda and are the major force in carrying out the CCP's education directives all over China. Such a caricature shatters the sublimated image of the intellectual as national conscience and cultural heroes.

More often Fang Fang subtly condemns intellectuals' lack of courage in their failure to maintain intellectual independence. In her "Drifting Clouds Running Water" (Xing yun liu shui)[28] two brothers, one a university lecturer and the other a research scientist, are given names which together form the Chinese idiom *renyunyiyun* meaning "say what others say". One of them, upon their professor parents' advice, deserts his fiancée simply because she has a politically "bad" family background which may affect his own future. The university teachers, including old

[28] . The story is collected in Fang Fang's anthology *Xin yun liu shui* (Drifting clouds and flowing water). Wuhan: Changjiang Wenyi Press, 1989.

professors, are urged to join a choir rehearsing for a singing competition under the theme "Socialism is Good" and so they comply, while being fully occupied by teaching duties, academic researches, and familial obligations in their financially straightened lives. The intellectuals' docility functions like footnotes explaining the meaning of the brothers' names with a vengeance: they not only say what others say but act accordingly. Thus they should be held partly responsible for their own plight.

Fang Fang, nevertheless, shows her sympathetic understanding of the historical contingency that determines the intellectual's situation, and in such understanding she cannot hold back a touch of irony. In her own family-saga story "Grandfather Lived in the Heart of Father" (Zufu huo zai fuqing de xin zhong) Fang Fang praised the dauntless spirit and intellectual integrity of her grandfather, a scholar dedicated to writing and teaching, who protected his fellow villagers against the Japanese invasion and died in defiance of the invaders' beastly atrocity.[29] In contrast, her father, who was determined to devote his talent to the new China's socialist construction, lived in humiliation as he, like numerous other intellectuals, had to go through endless "thought reform" under the CCP cadres' injunctions and submit "self-criticism" reports. He had no chance to realize his ambition and eventually died from a heart attack caused by a film which reminds him of his own father's intellectual integrity. In the midst of the story the narrator asks provocatively: Had Grandfather lived

[29]. Fang Fang, "Zufu huo zai fuqing de xin zhong" (Grandfather lived in the heart of Father) *Shanghai wenxue* (Shanghai literature), 4 (1990). In this autobiographical miniature of a family saga, Fang Fang virtually recorded her own grandfather's life and gave the real names of the paternal figures of her family to the protagonists.

in Father's time, would he have written stacks of self-criticism and lived in humiliation like Father? The answer is: he would.

Fang Fang brings out this view more distinctly when she writes: "The complicated lived experience is most powerful in shaping a person; one's existential conditions and circumstances can gradually change one's psyche, character and personality entirely."[30] Her short stories portraying intellectuals, who suffered political persecution in revolutionary movements, are full of parodic details. They tell a simple truth that intellectuals are ordinary people (if not more selfish and snobbish), and just as vulnerable. In "The Happy Man" (Xinfu zhi ren)[31] a young talented university teacher is wrongly accused as a "counter-revolutionary" and imprisoned for twenty years; after rehabilitation he still keeps his forever humble smile. What is more, he misses his labor reform camp because he is used to oppression and restriction. He is fearful of becoming "revisionist" when it is arranged for him to stay in a hostel with basic, but to him, "luxury" facilities. Accustomed to a humble and servile role, after he moves into a single bedroom in a teachers' dormitory, he immediately starts to clean the stinking public toilet with professional efficiency, which causes other teachers' resentment as they mistake him for a negligible cleaner, unqualified to share their quarters. The final touch of the story is seemingly light but powerful in satarizing the moral quality of the intellectual group.

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[30]. Fang Fang, *Fang Fang xiaoshuo jingcui* (Selected stories by Fang Fang)(Chengdu: Sichuan Renmin Press, 1998), p. 174.

[31]. For a reprinting of the story, see Fang Fang's anthology, *Heidong* (Black hole) Nanjing: Jiangsu Wenyi Press, 1996.

Fang Fang's ironic touch in parodic details comes out with greater sardonic intensity towards the selfish struggles within the intellectual circle. In "Yan Wu" intellectuals try to knock down each other in political movements, resulting in Yan Wu, the most academically promising among them, framed and imprisoned for thirteen years.[32] And Yan Wu himself completely loses his intellectual capacity after his release from prison, as he makes himself a rubbish collector equipped with a red rubbish cart for the sole purpose of becoming an eye-sore to his former colleagues who, however, soon get used to the sight. Amid this intellectual ruination, the surviving erstwhile talent becomes a sight of sorrow, whilst the others remain as egocentric and apathetic as ever.

If the parody of intellectuals is a daughter's examination of the father, then the daughter's worship of the father is destroyed in the process. In "White Calf" the journalist heroine Xiachun Dongqiu is proud of her poet father, but begins to feel a sense of inferiority when she learns that her father once reported on another poet, who was consequently exiled to a remote area for twenty years.[33] When she sees her father take sexual advantage of female students, she starts to vomit. Asked if she has cancer in her stomach, she replies: "Better let Father have such things as cancer". Such a bold answer is rare in any Chinese texts, and perhaps it is the first time that a daughter is given a rebellious voice in this way.

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32. For a reprinting of the story, see "San ren xing" (Three people travel together) in Fang Fang's anthology, *Wu chu duntao* (The dead end) Beijing: Beijing Shifan Daxue Press, 1993.

33. "White calf" (Bai ju), "White dream" (Bai meng) and "White fog" (Bai wu), the latter two to be discussed later, are all collected in Fang Fang's anthology *Bai meng* (White dream). Nanjing: Jiangsu Wenyi Press, 1996.

To remove the halo from intellectuals, by returning them to the historically embarrassing moment when they compromised or even betrayed their moral principles, is a remarkable achievement Fang Fang has made with her parodic details. This achievement is harmonic with the post-revolution, anti-heroic age. In this age, the intellectual elite can no longer make effective political propaganda, nor can they control social opinions or influence social manners; literature is no longer functioning as the lubricant of society. Instead, the new lubricant is money. With money as the overriding signifier of Chinese society, Fang Fang's parodic details became extremely useful in the creation of a Chinese style "novel of manners".

Re-describe Women in the Novel of Manners[34]

From what I have discussed in the above, we can see Fang Fang's works are distinct with the accent of "the ironic, playful intellectual" whom Rorty regards as "a desirable character-type".[35] The voice of the playful female intellectual, which is the authorial voice in most of Fang Fang's texts, finds a gender-specific agency in two female protagonists. One is the female journalist Xiachun Dongqiu in "White Calf" (Bai ju), and the other is the female editor/writer Jiahuo in "White Dream" (Bai meng). Thanks to their professional activities, both novellas provide a panorama of Chinese society and give the reins to Fang Fang's sarcastic wit.

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[34]. The novel of manners does not have a unified definition. Some describe it in more general terms, as in *Merriam Webster's Encyclopaedia of Literature* (Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster Incorporated Publishers, 1995); some in slightly different but more specific terms, as in *Bloomsbury Guide to English Literature* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995). Both include Jane Austin and Balzac's fiction as belonging to this category.

"White Calf" and "White Dream" together with "White Fog" (Bai wu) can be seen as pertaining to the genre called the "novel of manners". Strictly speaking, the three texts, with length ranging from forty to seventy pages, are not full-length novels. I use the term "novel" in a Bakhtinian sense, as " 'novel' is the name Bakhtin gives to whatever force is at work within a given literary system to reveal the limits, the artificial constraints of that system."[36] Therefore, what I name as a Chinese style novel of manners is at once similar and different from the traditional genre of the novel of manners which, *Merriam Webster's Encyclopaedia of Literature* defines as follows:

> Work of fiction that re-creates a social world, conveying with finely detailed observation the customs, values, and mores of a highly developed and complex society. The conventions of the society – codified behavior, acceptable terms of speech, and so on – dominate the story, and characters are differentiated by the degree to which they measure up to or fall below the uniform standard, or ideal of behavior.

In a way correspondent to the above definition, the three "White" texts by Fang Fang re-create Chinese society, describing its customs, values, and mores. The conventions of the contemporary Chinese society with its political jargon, codified behavior, and prevalent socio-political custom, dominate each text. Limited by textual space, however, the novelistic events or observed phenomena are strung together in a manner more

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[35]. Richard Rorty, "Freud and Moral Reflection" in *Essays on Heidegger and Others*, p. 158.

[36]. M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, p. xxxi.

concentrated and more typically presented than they are in any of Balzac or Jane Austin's novels. The protagonist's psychical activities are not fully unfolded, but wherever they emerge they appear as commentaries on or responses to the social customs, values, and mores, often directly connected to an event or a described phenomenon. What is most conspicuous in Fang Fang's three "White" texts, however, is a sardonic parody verging on the diabolic, in contrast to the more traditional realist description which aims at "mirroring" reality. Last but not the least important in the texts is the extremely playful tone of the parody, which always entices laughter from the reader. With the characteristics summarized above, the three "White" texts are unique in contemporary Chinese fiction. Yet, from a gender specific point of view, what further makes two ("White Calf" and "White Dream") of the three "White" texts uniquely striking is their protagonists Xiachun and Jiahuo, because they are presented as ironic, playful female intellectuals, entirely different from any other heroines.

In their essay "The Gender of Tragedy: Woman - On Female Images Under Male Writers' Pens", Lu Wenxin and Wang Qiaofen point out that male writers in the 1980s seem to be very interested in women of tragic fate, and they have formed a creative mode in regard to female images: "innocent, lively young maidens; shy, sweet, tender and selfless young women infatuated with love; striving mothers who sacrifice under humiliations."[37] But one may point out as well that the female images under women writers' pens are not very encouraging either. Like Dr Lu

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[37]. See Lan Dizhi & Li Yu (eds.), *Xunzang* (Buried alive with the dead) (Shenyang: Chuenfeng Wenyi Press, 1993), p. 210.

(At Middle Age), most female protagonists' characterizations are inscribed with traditionally endorsed femininity that either leads them to tragic ends or gives their lives a tragic note; Zhang Jie and Zhang Xinxin made a few exceptions, but the anger and resentment of their heroines only intensify their sufferings as women. In contrast to these tragic heroines, Xiachun and Jiahuo are presented as positive subjects who have transgressed the feminine existence of tragedy.

Situated as protagonists in the novel of manners, Xiachun and Jiahuo focus their attention on things around them and thus have a high consciousness of the other, which they display in their mocking sensitivity. Indeed, so much so that the female protagonist is a determined ironist: "the mock-modest woman" - the person who pretends to be or to know less than she actually is or does.[38]

At the very beginning of "White Dream" Jiahuo is shown to be a woman ironist. The novella begins with Jiahuo buying a Japanese woolen sweater from a peddler. As soon as she tries it on she feels "there is something wrong with the sweater". Suspecting that it was from a dead Japanese person's body, she takes it off and discovers a blood stain on its collar, but she shuts her eyes straight away and says to herself: "I have seen nothing." Her pretending act satirizes a prevailing mentality of self-deceiving and the declining social mores. Afterwards Jiahuo is reminded by her superior Old Wu, the head of the TV programs department at the TV station where she works, that she needs to have a pair of glasses as she

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[38]. I modified this definition from Nancy A. Walker's book *Feminist Alternatives: Irony and Fantasy in the Contemporary Novels by Women*. See footnote 44 in my Chapter One.

is severely short-sighted. To persuade her, Old Wu emphasizes the importance of spectacles by mentioning two men in the department who have perfect vision, but have recently started wearing glasses. This only gives Jiahuo a chance to refute him by proving glasses do not necessarily function for better vision. As she tells Old Wu, one man has just begun to study fuzzy aesthetics ("aesthetics" is translated in Chinese literally as "beauty study" [*meixue*] – the Chinese version obviously counts here), so he deliberately puts on high-powered glasses for fuzzy vision which, implicitly, will blur his vision and thus may enable him to "see" beauty by missing the ugly things; the other man decorates himself with glasses in order to show himself off as a learned scholar, as he has just finished his correspondent courses in college. As for herself, Jiahuo says: "If I put on glasses and see the world clearly, I would not know myself because I would not know if I am doing stupid things or just useless things." Thus, through her paradoxical yet thought-provoking witticism, Jiahuo is shown as a determined and playful ironist.

As an ironist, Jiahuo well suits the novella's unconventional structure, in which events do not progress into a climax but connect to each other more accidentally than systematically. She starts her journey through the fictional world from the most bodily level. Soon after the novella begins, Jiahuo has a diarrhea and a deliberate anti-utopia plot evolves from the female body. The scatological bodily detail of the "unrepresentable" female body is a deadly antidote to idealism and socialist propaganda. It belongs to "items completely foreign to that series from the reigning point of view (in its ideological and literary practice, as

well as in spoken language), items also foreign to the customary way of ordering things"[39]. It gives the narrative, as Bakhtin says, a direction: to "embody" the world and to measure everything on the scale of the body.[40] Along this direction, Jiahuo comes into a string of incidents interspersed with narrative comments which, with a centrifugal orientation, lashes out at ill social manners with irony and humor.

In the narrative development based on the body, Jiahuo is looking for a toilet in the city, anxious to relieve herself. The narrator traces back to how she gets the bowel trouble. While making a film in a medicine factory the day before and had too much free food customarily provided for public functionaries. As a result she has had to get up five or six times at night to use the toilet and has had to swallow a whole bottle of tablets, which used to be effective for her trouble but this time are to no avail. The tablets were the product of the factory, given to her by the factory head. Its poor quality suggests a ubiquitous irresponsibility in state-run factories but the fact that a medicine factory follows suit makes Jiahuo think that the factory head is really "capable to the extreme". The difficulties of finding a toilet in the city leads her to muse about the "difference between the city and the countryside", a political term hinting at one of the goals of communism: to wipe out the difference as such. At her urgent moment, however, Jiahuo finds country villages "admirable":

> In the peasant's house, there is always a position for you beside the pigsty. Even if the pigs grunt so near you and make you so ashamed

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[39]. M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, p. 181.

[40]. Ibid.

> of yourself for having shitted so little, the position is a consolation and hope. What a bliss if every city household would have a pigsty as the peasants in the countryside![41]

While such details make fun of the grand communist goal, the human beings' situation in meeting their natural needs contrasts disadvantageously to that of pigs. This theme is further enhanced when Jiahuo finds the hospital is as crowded as a shopping mall. The narrator, who is always empathetic with Jiahuo, comments in Jiahuo's reflection: "Things become cheap when there are too many of them. It is no exception with human beings. This is why the doctors and nurses treat their patients so badly that the patients dare not become ill again. People are less valuable than pandas, tigers and snub-nosed monkeys." The ironic remark thrusts not only at the bad attitude of the medical workers but also at the government for inadequate medical services.

When the female protagonist is not in a position to comment, the female authorial voice speaks up in her place, which expresses a female consciousness unfailingly linked to the body.

> More and more magnificent and luxury hotels, restaurants, and shopping malls are built, like men of great physical build competing with each other to see who is the mightiest. In contrast, hospitals, schools and kindergartens, crouching in obscure corners, look like shabby little daughter-in-laws of big families. The sight makes one feel that the Chinese need nothing else as long as they have things to eat and drink and shopping malls to idle away their time; only in foreign countries people would be bothered by matters such as

[41]. Fang Fang, "Bai meng" (White dream) in *Bai meng* (Nanjing: Jiangsu Wenyi Press, 1995), p. 16.

> becoming sick, attending schools, and putting children into kindergartens.[42]

If in the above passage words such as hospitals, schools and kindergartens as well as daughter-in-laws convey a feminine point of view, an even stronger female consciousness comes out in the narrative when Jiahuo wants to skip the queue for consultation because she is assigned to visit a young woman whose neighbor, a male university student, is arrested after stealing fifty-three times. I shall quote the passage at length so as to enable a view of the grotesque socio-ideological background against which Jiahuo's scatological detail functions.

> Curiously, everyone wished the girl to love her neighbor. They persuaded her to touch the man with love so that the man could turn over a new leaf. They had numerated such and such young women in Beijing and Shanghai who dare to fight against prejudice to marry a swindler or a hooligan. Well-informed people had reminded the young woman that doing so would qualify her for being a "March 8 Red-Banner Holder" or a representative at a conference. While the girl was still hesitating a newspaper reporter had already written a three-thousand-word report. As soon as she agrees, the report would be published on the first page of the newspaper. Old Wu was good at seizing fashionable themes. As soon as he heard about this matter he instructed Jiahuo to visit the young woman. He hoped that this time he could make a film to win a national award.[43]

In a seemingly detached tone, the above passage by itself is a parody of the relationship between women and socialism. On one hand, a woman is like

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[42]. Fang Fang, "Bai ju" (White calf) in *Bai meng* (White dream), p. 237.

a moral detergent to be used to cleanse society of immorality. On the other hand, the society is like a feudalistic father who tries to arrange a marriage for the benefit of the clan, not the bride herself.

The voice of the ironic female intellectual comes out most playfully in Jiahuo's encounter with a man about a prospective marriage. At the age of thirty, Jiahuo is still single, with no boyfriend. Her "spinsterhood" automatically invites sympathy from good-willed people in the family-centered Chinese society. Her friends and colleagues presume that she must be "self-abased" and so encourage her to be "confident" because she "still has a chance among divorced men". At one stage Old Wu introduces her to such a man, telling her: "Although that man was married before, he has no children. Moreover, his flat is very spacious. You should congratulate yourself if you can get him." Hearing this Jiahuo, who has never worried about her age before, mockingly "has a sense of inferiority as if she were really a piece of goods, which cannot be sold out." Amusing and revealing, the description of the match meeting is a parodic epitome of social mores, worth quoting at length:

> As soon as the man saw Jiahuo, he said: "To be honest, only men like me would take a woman like you." Jiahuo asked: "Why?" The man said contemptuously: "You are one of those on-the-shelf female intellectuals, good-for-nothing bookworms. Since I have only a junior high diploma, I figured, marrying a learned person ought to do me good." Jiahuo thought this man really is lovely. So she added: "I can write stories too." The man responded: "What's the use of writing stories? Go and check out how many people in my factory read stories." Jiahuo replied: "It doesn't matter whether

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[43]. Fang Fang, "Bai meng" (White dream) in *Bai meng* (White dream), p. 17.

> you people read it or not, I still get around one hundred bucks of royalties per month." The man quizzed: "Really? That much?" Jiahuo affirmed: "No joke, and if I put out an anthology, the money can exceed two or three grand." The man asked: "And the salary stays the same?" Jaihuo assured: "Of course. But my salary isn't much, only a little over ninety bucks." The man pressed: "Over ninety?" Jiahuo explained: "Low salary class." The man then queried:" Our business, can it be fixed today?" Jiahuo commented: "You seem brave." The man replied "I don't need to be brave about getting myself a wife."[44] [45]

Jiahuo then tells him that she has five lovers, who will paralyze any man that marries her. And the year before a man who was going to be her husband got his liver ruptured by her lovers with the power of *qigong*, which didn't leave any traces of external injuries. Upon hearing this, the man splutters and hurries away with a hand shielding his liver. In this hilarious parody, Jiahuo employs conventional values to defeat conventional values. She is devalued on the marriage market because of her age; however, her income earning power increases her value for the man, who considers himself superior and entitled to pick and choose. At the moment he is going to settle down on her, her information about her five violent "lovers" frightens the man away. The conventional values as represented here can be roughly categorized as "male" since the society is male dominant and feminine values are marked by feelings and love. If this is so, then Jiahuo is a detached beholder of social mores, who has transcended her "unfortunate" existence as a woman in this situation.

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[44]. Ibid., p.30.

Therefore, she is not even "resentful" as the "spinsters" in other stories, let alone "tragic".

This mental independence can also be seen in Xiachun. When Xiachun's husband leaves her to live with a female pop singer, Xiachun does not even show any sign of anger or resentment. She is not pleased but there is no jealousy on her part. Indeed, to be jealous would imply a competition between her and the singer for the man's favor; to be angry would betray emotional dependence. As a fully-fledged independent woman, she does not count on her husband for self-fulfillment. During his absence, she concentrates on her story writing. When her husband is fed up with the vulgar singer and wants to come back to her, she tells him that she is not a taxi which a passenger can get on and off any time, and that he has to wait until she is in a mood to have him back.

In focusing their attention on things outside of themselves, either by experiencing and ironizing, or by creating things themselves, the two female protagonists "forget", so to speak, the value scope the patriarchal society has delimited for women, therefore they transcend the womanly conditions of tragedy. Fang Fang thus sets up a new image of woman in her novel of manners against a literary tradition of female emotionality, sentimentality, weakness, sacrifice, and sufferings.

Conclusion: Female Consciousness as Consciousness of the Other

A plethora of desublimating details marks the texts of Can Xue, Liu Sola, and Fang Fang. Their language counteracts and dissolves the conventional narrative styles, and brings to each of them the acclaim for heralding respectively the avant-garde, the modernist, and the new realist writings in contemporary Chinese literature.

In terms of narrative styles, Can Xue's incoherent, dream language is highly effective in representing both the revolutionary, maddening China and the patriarchal conservative China. With discrete, illogical utterances, most of her characters display pathological symptoms of a pathological society. Can Xue's novel *Breaking-Out Performance*, which castigates not only the social environment but also the phallocentric, conservative mainstream literature. Her narrative language, although radically new in the 1980s, is limited in its communicative function by obscurity. Moreover, most of her characters insist on linguistic incoherence as the only way of expression, each displaying an enclosed psyche. Such enclosed narrative is also symptomatic of solipsism, therefore self-defeating in the long run, if the writer expects to be read and understood, especially if she expects her writing to be effective in communicating feminist consciousness.

Liu Sola's stories form a self-narrative, which represents not only her own but also her generation of educated women's experiences as female individuals. This self-narrative goes through stages of vacillation, searching and finishes in an open-ended finale of uncertainty with solipsism, hedonism, and moral values. Her new style of an unconventional, fragmentary narrative is unprecedented in contributing to a vision of the fluid and decentered female self.

If Can Xue and Liu Sola in their own particular styles provided a personalized language that expresses their feminist consciousnesses, then

Fang Fang's parodic fiction displays a sharp critical edge towards all hypocrisy and sublimation by way of parodic details linking to the body. Her particular feminist consciousness is concentrated in the female protagonists of her fiction pertaining to the novel of manners, and they are the incarnation of the playful ironic female intellectual, who accentuates all Fang Fang's stories. In doing so, Fang Fang's works show a high consciousness of the other, and thus they display, as Rorty says, "that the best way of tinkering with ourselves is to tinker with something else".[1] That is, for Chinese women writers, to tinker with society.

[1]. Richard Rorty, "Freud and Moral Reflection" in *Essays on Heidegger and Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 163.

Conclusion

My investigation of contemporary Chinese women's writing leads me to a shifting and changing female consciousness which, as I have tried to demonstrate, is embedded in women's writing as the most crucial factor that makes women writers' texts different from those written by male writers. Such female consciousness is also a product of my reading. In the process of reconstructing this female consciousness, I cannot pretend that my own amusement, embarrassment, irony, nostalgia, and frustration did not affect my writing, as I myself belong to the generation of Chinese women whom I write about. My reading is thus both benefited and limited by my empathy with the women writers as well as their texts.

Female consciousness is rooted in women's experience of living as women and comes into form in the bordering phenomenon of women's encounters with patriarchal ideology. It is in this light that a woman's text is, as Virginia Woolf says,

> always feminine; it cannot help being feminine; at its best it is most feminine; the only difficulty lies in defining what we mean by feminine.[1]

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[1]. Quoted from Elaine Showalter "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" in *Writing and Sexual Difference* (ed. Elizabeth Abel) (London: Harvester Press, 1982), p. 14.

While being feminine may also mean passive acceptance of patriarchal rules, my reading of female consciousness is selective and points to its subversive expressions. Such a reading is based on contemporary Chinese women's lived experience as refracted in the texts.

Female consciousness finds expressions in the discourse of love, in re-narcissisizing the "inferiorized" female body, and in exploring the prescribed womanly conditions in career and familial roles. It also emerges in the stylistic changes of narratives, conducing to the employment of the language of the body. In all these textual undertakings, the female consciousness takes shape in various details, which are often ironically contextualized. Its characteristics as represented in the texts can be summarized as holding a negative stance towards the status quo, therefore it desires and criticizes. The "feminine" styles, featuring "feminine" details, measure up to the pathos of the anti-heroic, anti-utopian pragmatic age. Female consciousness thus bears its birth mark of encountering a changing reality but, most importantly, lies in a desire for a society pleasurable, not only for men, but for all.

Dealing with an overwhelmingly repressive mainstream narrative and social situation, female consciousness comes out through textual cracks, in and between details. It re-describes and satirizes. It speaks as a third voice (beside the authoritative voice and the voice of the dissident), which is the voice of irony, reminder, and laughter.

Ironically, however, the female consciousness, as expressed by the majority of contemporary Chinese women writers, seems to be unaware of the existence of Chinese peasant women. Rarely would any of the writers describe a peasant woman in depth. The fact that this inadequacy emerged from a society, where the laboring people were politically regarded as superior to intellectuals,

was a big irony of the revolutionary age. Nevertheless, it exposes a limit in women's writing, namely, the high degree of self-referentiality.[2] This limit evidences that gender is, but may not always be, *the* unifying factor in women's writings. Moreover, in recovering female consciousness in women's literature, the consciousness as such is subject to the cathexis of the elite intellectual women, thus female consciousness is never fully recoverable.

The textualized and intertextualized female consciousness is not a positive entity. It is a discursive strategy. With awareness of the body and the prosaic nature of life, this discursive strategy manifests a deliberation to deconstruct the grand linguistic edifice of mainstream ideologies. The feminine stance of this discursive strategy is informed by a stubborn concern for the individual. This concern forms the basis of communion between female consciousness and male writers. In spite of this communion, female consciousness, bodied forth from women's lived experience, remains uniquely distinctive and disruptive in a context where patriarchal ideology reigns supreme.

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[2]. Quite a few feminist critics have noted this feature of women's writing. For reference, one may read Judith Kegan Gardiner, " On female Identity and Writings by Women" in Elizabeth Ebel (ed.), *Writing and Sexual Difference* (London: The Harvester Press, 1982), p. 185; Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 122-175; Nancy A. Walker, *Feminist Alternatives: Irony and fantasy in the Contemporary Novel by Women* (Jakson and London: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), pp. 75-112.

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